

**The Quest for Identity in Sorley MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn':
Journeying into Politics and Beyond**

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*For my Gran Moffatt (1912-1991) and my mother,
two inspirational women with a love of history and literature,
who generously passed on that love to me.*

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed by me and that the work herein is my own and has not been submitted in candidature for any other degree, postgraduate diploma or professional qualification.

Abstract

This thesis aims to deepen our understanding of 'An Cuilithionn', which is generally considered to be Sorley MacLean's most important political poem, by examining the main symbol in the poem, the mountain, in its interaction with the secondary symbols, and also the historical-political figures who figure in the poem. Very little detailed work on 'An Cuilithionn' has been carried out, and for this reason this thesis has to establish a sound foundation for research on 'An Cuilithionn'. A multi-disciplinary approach allows a fuller understanding of the poem to emerge.

The specific aim of the thesis is to understand more fully how heart and mind interact in MacLean's vision of the hero on the mountain. I view 'An Cuilithionn' as MacLean's meditation on human nature and, because this poem was composed at a time when many of the Scottish intelligentsia of which MacLean was part were assessing their own views on action and pacifism, I also postulate that in 'An Cuilithionn' MacLean contemplates the nature of his own identity in that light. The argument of the thesis is based on the premise that in 'An Cuilithionn' politics significantly contribute to how MacLean views heroism and his identity is defined by how he perceives figures of history such as Lenin, Dimitrov and James Connolly. I use the psychological approaches of both Julia Kristeva and C.G. Jung as well as the literary theory of Northrop Frye to gain a broader perspective on the topic.

In Chapter 1 MacLean's literary influences as well as the contemporary literary and political climate of Scotland in general are examined. In Chapter 2 and 3 I define the theoretical framework of my inter-disciplinary approach to the subject. In Chapter 4 I speculate whether the main symbols in the poem, the mountain and morass, originate from MacLean's own personal view of the universe and in Chapter 5 I examine the secondary symbols, the sea-monster and stallion, which reflect the personal and political themes in the poem. The dynamic, which I propose is present in the symbols that I have already looked at in the previous chapters, is further considered in Chapter 6 in relation to MacLean's ideal of the self-sacrificed hero using, in particular, James Frazer's meta-narrative of the dying and reviving god and Northrop Frye's literary myth of death and rebirth. In Chapter 7 I connect the theme of self-sacrifice in 'An Cuilithionn' to MacLean's use of Hugh MacDiarmid's poem, 'If there are bounds to any man', which he incorporated into Part V of 'An Cuilithionn', and I show that MacLean's socialist ideals are inextricably linked to his belief in the eternal striving of the hero, which leads him towards a fuller understanding of the course of mankind as a whole.

This thesis raises the question of how MacLean views the individual and the collective as well as the personal and the political. It also explores MacLean's responses to his major influences such as Communism and religion and examines how he deals with these in both an intellectual and emotional way.

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Abbreviations

NLS	National Library of Scotland
CW	Collected Works

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on Sorley MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn'. This poem is understandably viewed as one of MacLean's most political works and his commitment to Communism is evident throughout the seven parts of the poem. One purpose of the poem is to catalogue the wrongs which have been inflicted on his own people of Skye and Raasay throughout the ages by the capitalists and landowners, and in this respect the poem remains true to its Socialist views. However, the thesis endeavours to go beyond these established ideas concerning 'An Cuilithionn' and to investigate the main symbol of the mountain as well as secondary symbols as evidence for MacLean's understanding of his own identity. 'An Cuilithionn' is essentially an idealistic poem because its vision does not just deal with the past but also attempts to glimpse the future and thus delivers a message of hope to the reader that if the oppressed and subjugated people of the world strive hard enough the world will ultimately become a better place. In this respect the poem is consistent throughout its seven parts. However, I propose that there is also an aspect of the poem which allows the reader to chart Sorley MacLean's own personal route towards his understanding of politics, heroism and his own place within the world as a whole.

This thesis is an attempt to better understand the man who composed 'An Cuilithionn'. Since its scope is restricted to one poem discussion of the poet's outlook and thought processes relates primarily to the specific period of the late 1930s during which the poem was composed. For a poet such as Sorley MacLean, who was aware of his position as one of the Scottish intelligentsia during the turbulent period of the Spanish Civil War and the lead-up to World War II, the questions he was asking himself reflected the specific events of his own time. Young men in MacLean's circle of friends were questioning the nature of heroism and assessing their principles regarding action and pacifism. I suggest that while 'An Cuilithionn' is a general meditation on human nature, it is also a contemplation by a young poet on the nature of his own identity and how he reacts to injustices within his own world. If this is indeed the case 'An Cuilithionn' can also be viewed as a cathartic journey by MacLean into his own history and, by extension, his own identity, since his Gaelic heritage undoubtedly influenced how he viewed himself. Another poem, 'Dol an Iar', composed during his active service in the British Army during World War II, illustrates MacLean's view of heroism and how closely connected it is with his Gaelic identity - 'tha mi de dh'fhir mhór' a' Bhràighe./

de Chloinn Mhic Ghille Chaluim threubhaich,/ de Mhathanaich Loch Aills nan geurlann.’¹

The Cuillin symbolises many things for MacLean in the poem. It provides him with a connection to his native landscape and his own ancestors. It is also a meeting place for all of the opposites which he attempts to understand in the poem - at one point in Part III he states that the Cuillin is the meeting place for both Lenin and Christ.² All of the visions of the past which MacLean witnesses unfold on the peaks of the mountain and near the end of Part VII he glimpses ‘am falbhan’/‘the journeying one’ on the Cuillin. Thus the Cuillin represents a starting point for the poet from which he can review the past, as well as a future destination or goal which he can strive towards. It is for this reason that ‘An Cuilithionn’ can be interpreted as a transformational poem for MacLean - he questions the very meaning of the individual striving for the highest pinnacle of achievement and he experiences its meaning profoundly, thus moving towards a fuller understanding of himself and his own place in the world. What is more difficult to answer is the question whether this is a deliberate process, envisaged as part of the scope of ‘An Cuilithionn’ at the outset of composition, or if this took place for MacLean over a period of time as the poem was composed. I would suggest that the former explanation applies to MacLean. One of the major themes in ‘An Cuilithionn’ which I deal with in the thesis is the interaction between ‘heart’ and ‘intellect’ - a theme which spans ‘An Cuilithionn’ but also surfaces in other work by MacLean such as *Dàin do Eimhir*.³ In ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean shows that political commitment cannot be fully realised unless it is experienced emotionally as well as intellectually and if this theory is applied to MacLean’s own writing process it is more likely that MacLean was fully aware from the outset that in order to understand heroism he must experience its meaning emotionally for himself.

Long before MacLean developed his adult political sensibilities and made the symbolic connection between mankind’s struggle and the mountain, the Cuillin was an influence on him because of its location as a major landmark which was visible from Raasay, his childhood home. The Cuillin dominates the greater part of the Skye landscape. Formed from

¹ Sorley MacLean, *O Choille gu Bearradh/ From Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems* (Edinburgh: Carcanet/ Birlinn, 1999) p. 206.

² MacLean, 1999, p. 90.

³ See *Somhairle MacGill-Eain/ Sorley MacLean: Dàin do Eimhir* ed. by Christopher Whyte (Glasgow: The Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 2002). See in particular *Dàin II*, ‘A Chiall ’s a Ghràidh’ (pp. 44-47) in which the poet suggests that his intellect and his love are not, in effect, a duality - ‘Is thubhairt mo thuigse ri mo ghaol:/ Cha dhuinn an dùbailteachd:/ tha ’n coimeasgadh sa ghaol.’

molten magma, the pressure which forced the magma upwards continued even as the gabbro rock was solidifying and what remains today are the eroded remnants of the solidified magma reservoir.⁴ The Cuillin is a collection of individual peaks, many of which are mentioned in ‘An Cuilithionn’. They include Sgurr Biorach, Sgurr nan Gilleann, Sgurr a’ Ghreadaidh, Gàrsbheinn, Sgurr na Banachdaich and Sgurr Alasdair. Many of these peaks are in contrast to one another with different types of gabbro making the mountain range appear to vary in colour from black to the yellow-orange colour of peridotite.⁵

It may also be the variety of the peaks which attracts climbers to the Cuillin. Gordon Stainforth describes the appeal of the Cuillin in terms of personal discovery:

Certainly, in a landscape such as this we get closer to our real selves. Here, stripped of our masks and pretences, we come face to face with our limitations and our inadequacies. The experience is not only sobering, but refreshing...It’s not just ourselves that we’re interested in, but that missing link with the natural world. It is as if this primitive, almost sterile setting holds, in some way, the key to life itself, some vital secret...It is redolent, not just of geological forces beyond our comprehension but of something altogether less tangible. It seems somehow to be pregnant with an inner creative power that has a crucial relevance to our lives, even if we cannot say exactly what it is.⁶

As a climber of the Cuillin himself MacLean may well have understood sentiments such as these, and it is this connection between himself and nature which Sorley MacLean attempts to put into words in his poem. He grew up on Raasay surrounded by woodland and yet, just across on Skye there was the contrast in the landscape with the great form of the Cuillin, dominating the horizon and pointing towards the heavens.

Parallels can be drawn between Stainforth’s mention of the Cuillin holding creative power and the Cencrastus-like sea-serpent which is coiled around the Cuillin in Part VII of the poem. This symbol, reminiscent of the Ouroboros,⁷ also holds creative power according to mythology and its movement is supposed to mirror the movement of history. In ‘An Cuilithionn’ there is undoubtedly a strong impression of the occurrence of movement. There is the movement of time from the past to the present as MacLean explores figures and events

⁴ Gordon Stainforth, *The Cuillin: Great Mountain Ridge of Skye* (London: Robinson, 2002) p. 20

⁵ Stainforth, 2002, p. 34.

⁶ Stainforth, 2002, p. 52.

⁷ The Ouroboros is studied in depth in Chapter 4 of the thesis.

throughout history, including modern events such as the Spanish Civil War. This movement can be interpreted in many ways and, while I am aware that there may be other types of movement taking place in ‘An Cuilithionn’ which this thesis does not explore,⁸ in my research I propose there is a dynamic which I have been so bold as to characterise as an outward spiral movement. I am aware that this is a highly tentative suggestion but I wish to explore the idea that the secondary symbols in the poem, in particular the sea-serpent and the stallion, are actually intended by MacLean to mirror this spiral movement.

It is necessary at this point, even before I discuss my methodology in Chapter 2, to elaborate on my views regarding the spiral and its possible place in ‘An Cuilithionn’. Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant point out that the spiral is an ‘open’ and optimistic motif which is encountered in all cultures and which symbolizes the development of strength. They write that ‘the double spiral symbolizes simultaneously the two directions of this movement, birth and death...or the death and the rebirth as a changed person which occurs in initiation.’⁹ They go on to write:

A single spiral stands for the coiled and parti-coloured serpent which is an image of the creator and of the cyclical current of life. It also stands for Heaven and for the soul’s cyclical wanderings, in succession incarnate, discarnate and reincarnate. A spiral with its coils streaked at regular intervals signifies ‘the course of human life, alternating between good and evil.’¹⁰

The sea-serpent which MacLean describes in Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’ is, I submit, directly related to this mythic paradigm and I explore my reasons for this statement in Chapter 4. From a Gaelic perspective MacLean would have been familiar with history being described in cycles of alternating good and evil due to the image of the wheel of fortune which is alluded to in many Gaelic poems from the 17th and 18th century.¹¹ He also mentions

⁸ I have in mind here the ‘lyrical peaks’ which MacLean discusses in his critical essays. See ‘My Relationship with the Muse’ in *Ris a’ Bhruthaich: The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley MacLean*. ed. by William Gillies (Stornoway: Acair, 1985) pp. 6-14 (p. 11). It would be useful to investigate the ‘shape’ which they form in a long poem such as ‘An Cuilithionn’ and the implications of this.

⁹ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*. trans. by John Buchanan-Brown (London: Penguin Books, 1996) p. 907

¹⁰ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 909.

¹¹ See ‘Oran do Mhac Leòid Dhùn Bheagain’ by an Clàrsair Dall: ‘Chaidh a’ cuibhle mun cuairt,/ghrad thionndaidh gu fuachd am blàths.’ *The Blind Harper: The Songs of Roderick Morison and His Music* ed. by William Matheson (Edinburgh: The Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1970), p. 58. MacLean’s own lyric about the wheel of fortune is heavily influenced by these lines. For a list of other examples of poems in which the idea of the wheel of fortune and destiny occurs see *An Lasair: Anthology of 18th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse*, ed. by Ronald Black (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001) p. 527.

the image of the wheel of history turning in Part VI of ‘An Cuilithionn’ when he writes ‘Cuibhle na h-Eachdraidh a’ dol mun cuairt./ Oirre cha toir an domhainn buaidh.’¹² This point about the Gaelic wheel can be reinforced further by Chevalier and Gheerbrant:

With its dual meaning of contraction and expansion, the symbolism of the spiral is linked to that of the wheel and is found as often or even more frequently in Celtic carvings or as a decorative motif in metalwork, pottery, coinage and so on.¹³

MacLean’s idea of the hero in his poem, while not as overt as Chevalier and Gheerbrant’s idea of the cyclical wanderings of the continuously reincarnated soul, nevertheless does support the spiral dynamic since MacLean describes the course of human history in ‘An Cuilithionn’ as being influenced by the birth, death and rebirth of the heroic spirit which dwells in figures throughout the ages, thus ensuring that mankind can continue to develop. I explore the concept of the hero in ‘An Cuilithionn’ more fully in Chapter 5 in relation to the spiral.

I have so far shown my reasons for suggesting a spiral movement in ‘An Cuilithionn’ from a symbolic-mythic perspective but I postulate that it also has a political significance in relation to MacLean’s Socialist views. Dialectical materialism, the political theory developed by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, uses a spiral to describe its central concept, with Lenin suggesting that knowledge does not develop in a straight line but instead forms a series of circles or a spiral so that nothing becomes stagnant and development can continue.¹⁴ Lenin describes dialectics as ‘the doctrine of the unity of opposites’¹⁵ and the idea of the unity of opposites is at the heart of a great amount of the work of the influential Scottish writer, Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve) (1892-1978), as well as MacLean’s work. I explore this theory further in my methodology in Chapter 2 since it influences an important part of my argument in Chapter 6. Its relevance to MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’ is particularly striking and it seems surprising that while many scholars have pondered the oppositions inherent in MacLean’s poetry such as love and political duty, what has not been researched is how these oppositions relate to political theory, which we know from his introduction to ‘An Cuilithionn’ in *O*

¹² MacLean, 1999, p. 116.

¹³ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, 909.

¹⁴ *V.I. Lenin’s Collected Works* Vol 38 4th English Edition, ed. by Stewart Smith and trans. by Clemens Dutt (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), pp. 362-363.

¹⁵ *V.I. Lenin’s Collected Works* Vol 38 4th English Edition, ed. by Stewart Smith and trans. by Clemens Dutt (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1972), pp. 221-222.

Choille gu Bearradh that MacLean was considering at the time of writing:

The first two parts of the poem were made by June 1939, when I was closest to Communism, although I never accepted the whole of Marxist philosophy, as I could never resolve the idealist-materialist argument.¹⁶

The fact that MacLean is openly indicating another opposition in his poetry and that he is hinting that it influenced his writing in some way cannot be ignored. Oppositions within a spiral of continuing life is what dialectical materialism is based on and is another instance in which a spiral dynamic, which I view as being present in ‘An Cuilithionn’, comes into play.

Of course, it is not just the physical aspect of the mountain that would have had an effect on MacLean as a poet. The mountain is also an important image in Gaelic poetry throughout the centuries, due to its prominence within the Highland landscape, and MacLean would have been well aware of this aspect of the mountain. In Màiri Mhór’s ‘Eilean a’ Cheò’¹⁷ and in Neil Macleod’s ‘Fàilte don Eilean Sgitheanach’¹⁸ the Cuillin is praised for its sublime beauty. MacLean has the riches of Gaelic tradition behind him in his choice of the Cuillin as a heroic symbol, and the local history of the Land Agitation with its passionate cry for the justice of the people is consistent with MacLean’s later interest in Communism. All of this contributes to the many voices which are present in ‘An Cuilithionn’; but MacLean’s relationship with his landscape is also a highly personal one, and this is the reason why, in this thesis, I have chosen to begin my study from a psychological perspective, focussing on MacLean’s personal journey on the mountain before moving outwards to look at how and why the wider concepts of heroism, and in particular, political heroism, are given a spiritual dimension by MacLean.

Chapter 1 begins by introducing Sorley MacLean in a short biography and then studies in more detail his early influences and his university life. Throughout this thesis I take into consideration how the politics and literary climate of the period may go some way towards influencing a poet and his material. In this chapter I discuss this at some length in relation to the Scottish Literary Renaissance, the development of Scottish Nationalism and the effect that Hugh MacDiarmid had on the young Scottish poets and writers of the 1930s.

¹⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 63.

¹⁷ *Caran an t-Saoghail: Anthology of 19th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse* ed. by Donald E. Meek (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2003) pp. 366-375.

¹⁸ Meek, 2003, pp. 16-21.

MacDiarmid's influence on MacLean should not be underestimated, and while it should also be noted that MacLean developed his own ideas independent of MacDiarmid's, MacDiarmid's political poetry and ideas are nevertheless an integral part of this thesis.

In Chapter 2 I discuss my methodology. At the heart of my thesis lies the examination of what MacLean believes his identity consists of and how he expresses this in his poem. To understand MacLean's own metaphysical system it is important to lay out a brief history of the self from a literary, philosophical and psychological perspective. While historical figures feature in the poem, mythic figures are also present and in this chapter I also discuss my approach towards myth. I do not just look at specific mythic figures in the thesis but also the 'shape' of these myths, in other words, the meta-narratives which lie behind the sacrificial hero.

In the second half of Chapter 2 I survey the sources which I refer to throughout the thesis. I provide an outline of 'An Cuilithionn' itself and review the critical essays and other work written by MacLean, especially where works give evidence of MacLean's views on politics. I also include a detailed discussion of the unpublished letters between MacLean and Douglas Young which were written during World War II. These letters are invaluable sources of information on MacLean's political thoughts as well as his literary ideals in the time period just after 'An Cuilithionn' was composed and, when put in order, his thought processes and developing political consciousness can be surveyed. This chapter finishes with a review of the work of other scholars on MacLean and discusses the lack of research in certain areas of the field.

Chapter 3 begins to focus on what can be viewed of MacLean's own identity in 'An Cuilithionn'. In my thesis I propose that for the poet, there is a striving to achieve a better insight into his identity in the poem and I use the theories of Julia Kristeva and C.G. Jung to investigate this idea. I chose to approach the poem from a psychological perspective first because MacLean never steps onto a mythical mountain that is a different shape from the real Cuillin, and I wanted to assess the extent to which certain symbols such as the mountain and the morass, which are used to represent major themes in the poem, had a foundation in MacLean's own personal view of the universe.

In Chapter 4 these ideas are taken a stage further by investigating the way in which

MacLean uses the symbols of the sea-monster and stallion, which have their origins in myth, religion and literature, in order to highlight his own personal and political themes in the poem. In this chapter I assess the nature of these specific symbols to view to what extent they mirror the poem's overall purpose.

In Chapter 5 I discuss the significance of the patterns of movement, which I have already identified in the nature of the symbols of the sea-monster and the stallion, to the overriding image of the life-pattern of the hero in 'An Cuilithionn'. By invoking James Frazer's meta-narrative of the dying and reviving god and Northrop Frye's theory of the wheel of the year symbolising the death and rebirth of the self-sacrificial hero I show that MacLean's political hero is part of a long line of historical-political and literary heroes who are envisioned as the saviours of the people.

In Chapter 6 I continue to look at the theme of self-sacrifice and of striving to further mankind at any cost by considering MacLean's use of MacDiarmid's poem 'If there are bounds to any man' in relation to Prometheus, Christ and Marxist thought. I go full circle in this chapter by returning to the theme of MacLean's own identity and I ask how, in 'An Cuilithionn', creativity and sacrifice go hand in hand for MacLean and how the oppositions which are encountered in the poem, such as Communism and religion, can metaphorically meet on the heights of the Cuillin.

In my Conclusion I acknowledge that MacLean has been influenced, overtly or otherwise, by Communism and the strict structures of Free Presbyterian Raasay during his childhood, and that these influences are evident in the symbols of 'An Cuilithionn'. The energy which is inherent in the poem and his belief in the value of self-sacrifice for the good of mankind can be directly related back to these, often opposing, influences. I show how my research has convinced me that in 'An Cuilithionn' the individual and the collective are inextricably bound up with one another. The conventional opposites of heart and mind, which MacLean alludes to throughout the poem, are not a real duality and are, in fact, two manifestations of a unity. For MacLean, an emotional response is necessary if he is to fully function within a political sphere and his ideal of the hero, which is often Romantic in its conception, is nevertheless deeply affected by his political beliefs.

The way in which this research is presented could have been radically different - I could

have started in the early chapters by looking at the universal aspects of the hero and his meanings as portrayed by MacLean and then in the later chapters bring this into a local and more personal focus. The findings might still have been the same but I feel that it is appropriate to start with the personal aspects of the poem before moving outwards to the universal meanings since this is how MacLean himself constructs 'An Cuilithionn'. In his own words he describes the poem as 'radiating from Skye and the West Highlands to the whole of Europe'¹⁹ so I think it is apt that my thesis follows this same pattern.

I take an inter-disciplinary approach with this thesis and I trust that my research is the richer and fuller for my venturing into the fields of psychology, philosophy, political and literary studies. I could not have given MacLean's work the complete analysis that it deserved if I had not taken this approach. The truth of this statement became clear to me when I came across an address by the chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, Zinoviev, written in 1918 after an assassination attempt on Lenin, which I also refer to in Chapter 6 of the thesis. In one section of the address he uses the same image of the swamp as MacLean does.

Referring to Lenin he writes:

Someone powerful and strong has disturbed the petty-bourgeois swamp. The movement of the water begins. On the horizon a figure has appeared. He is really the chosen one of millions. He is the leader by the grace of God. He is the authentic figure of a leader such as is born once in 500 years in the life of mankind.²⁰

Until I discovered this address, I had viewed the morass in 'An Cuilithionn' as being simply a device which acted in opposition to the heroic mountain. In the poem MacLean is repelled by the morass and seems to have an instinctive response to its presence. However, I realised that Soviet rhetoric had employed the same symbol and divined that MacLean's use of the morass was thus far more complex than I had at first thought. To simply concentrate on one aspect of the symbol at the expense of the other aspects would be to deny MacLean's symbols their full power. When I discovered the political significance of the morass it opened up the possibility of there being other meanings attached to the same image. In Psalm 69 it is written 'Save me from sinking mud;/ keep me safe from my enemies'²¹ and in Isaiah 57 the Lord said 'But evil

¹⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 63

²⁰ Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives: The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (London: Harvard University Press, 1997) p. 82. I provide the details of its publication, availability in English and distribution on p. 241 of my thesis. It is highly possible that MacLean would have been familiar with this published address.

²¹ Psalm 69: 14.

men are like the restless sea, whose waves never stop rolling in, bringing filth and muck'.²²

The idea of the mud-filled pit was later employed by Bunyan in *The Pilgrim's Progress*:

I saw then in a dream, so far as this valley reached, there was on the right hand a very deep ditch; that ditch is it, into which the blind hath led the blind in all ages, and have both miserably perished. Again, behold, on the left there was a very dangerous quag, into which, if even a good man falls, he finds no bottom for his feet to stand on.²³

Thus it could be maintained that the morass has a Biblical aspect as well as a psychological and political one. It is perfectly feasible for MacLean to have a number of meanings for symbols in his mind at the same time. What my thesis also sets out to prove is that these multiple meanings are not only present in 'An Cuilithionn' but are also interconnected and, in certain cases, interdependent. This is an entirely more complex and controversial point but, as the thesis unfolds, I hope to show that this is indeed a possible reading of MacLean's big poem.

While the remit of this thesis is to understand MacLean's 'journey' on the mountain from a psychological, political and spiritual perspective, there is no reason why this sort of approach cannot be applied to other poems by Sorley MacLean and to other twentieth-century Gaelic poems in general and it is hoped that this thesis may encourage the continuation of this method of research in relation to other 20th Century Gaelic poets such as George Campbell Hay, Iain Crichton Smith and Derick Thomson.

²² Isaiah 57:20.

²³ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1961) p. 69. Donald Meek has pointed out that *The Pilgrim's Progress* became part of the shared spiritual biography of the Gaelic people due to the excellent translation of Bunyan's work into Gaelic by Patrick MacFarlane in 1812. See Donald E. Meek, 'The Pulpit and the Pen: Clergy, Orality and Print in the Scottish Gaelic World', in *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain 1500-1850*, ed. by Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (Manchester, 2003), pp. 84-118 (p. 93).

Chapter 1.

An Outline of Sorley MacLean: The Man, His Background and His Influences

Introduction

Sorley MacLean's early life, his political and literary influences, and friendships with important members of the Scottish literati would, without doubt, have had an overall effect on 'An Cuilithionn'. In this chapter I will outline the major important events in MacLean's life and I will examine the political and literary climate of Scotland in the 1920s and 1930s in more detail in order to better understand 'An Cuilithionn' in this context.

1.1 A Short Biography and Timeline

Sorley MacLean has rightly been described as a Gaelic poet whose verse is shot through with an awareness of tensions.²⁴ Polarity exists on many levels of his work. However, this play of opposites also exists within his life – MacLean is one of the first Gaelic poets who fully embraced modern influences while still retaining a link with his traditional past. He mixed left wing politics with a Presbyterian background and a native Gaelic sense of place. All of this has contributed to his uniqueness and has ensured that his vision of the Highlands, Scotland and the wider world will not fade over time.

Born on Raasay in 1911, MacLean was raised in Osgaig, Raasay and was one of a family of seven. His early years were filled with music and song and he particularly remembers his father's mother singing the great Gaelic songs to him.²⁵ According to MacLean he was not a singer himself but he compensated for this with a sensitive understanding of rhythm and time.²⁶ By the time he left Raasay for Edinburgh University in 1929 he had a great knowledge of what he describes as the 'old songs' of Gaelic tradition and throughout his lifetime these can be seen to have had a profound influence on his work, constantly pulling him back to his

²⁴ Robert Calder, 'Celebration of a Tension' in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*, ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 155-163 (p. 155).

²⁵ MacLean, 1985, p. 7.

²⁶ MacLean, 1985, p. 8.

native landscape. They offered him ‘a breathtaking evocation of the natural background as well as passion as great as words can hold...’²⁷ MacLean went to Braes for a fortnight each year to stay with his mother’s side of the family, his Aunt Katie and Uncle Calum, and it was here that he heard many Màiri Mhór songs from his aunt.²⁸ His father’s sisters were also good singers and he remembers hearing from his Aunt Flora a cradle-rocking refrain for the ‘Braes of Uig’ that he had ‘never heard from anybody else’.²⁹ It is yet another example of tension and polarity in MacLean’s life that his family had such a rich background in Gaelic oral culture and yet he was brought up on Raasay with its strong Free Presbyterian tradition. MacLean shows that the two do not always sit well together when he emphasises the fact that his mother’s family had ‘learned many old songs from their MacLeod mother...who had a fine voice, and many old songs even though she was a pious ‘adherent’ of the Free Presbyterian Church.’³⁰

MacLean chose to study Honours English Language and Literature as opposed to Honours Celtic at university because it was ‘economically disastrous’ to take Celtic. Most of the positions in Celtic departments at that time were filled by young academics³¹ and thus jobs would be scarce once MacLean had graduated. MacLean gained a First Class degree in English and it was during these years that he was able to explore English literature properly for the first time. He familiarised himself with the likes of W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and Hugh MacDiarmid as well as the movements in literature such as Romanticism and Modernism. He continued his studies at Moray House, the teacher training college, and around this time was introduced to C.M. Grieve (Hugh MacDiarmid) at Rutherford’s Bar. A friendship soon flourished between the two men.³²

²⁷ Sorley MacLean, ‘Old Songs and New Poetry’ in *Ris a’ Bhruthaich: The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley MacLean*. ed. by William Gillies (Stornoway: Acair Ltd, 1985) pp. 106-119 (p. 112).

²⁸ MacLean, 1985, p. 8

²⁹ MacLean, 1985, p. 7. In ‘My Relationship with the Muse’ MacLean goes into detail about how his mother and father’s family had such a strong tradition of music and song and describes his memories of these people as well as giving a brief family tree. See also Donald Archie MacDonald ‘Some Aspects of Family and Local Background: An Interview with Sorley MacLean’ in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*. ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 211-222.

³⁰ MacLean, 1985, p. 8.

³¹ Joy Hendry, ‘Sorley MacLean: The Man and his Work’ in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*. ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 9-38 (p. 12).

³² Alan Bold, *MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve): A Critical Biography* (London: John Murray, 1988) p. 323.

In 1934 MacLean took up his first teaching post in Portree Secondary School, helping to finance the education of his younger brothers and sisters. This was during the time of the Depression and his choice to go into teaching may have been influenced by the economic recession. His brother John, who was a distinguished classicist, had gone to Cambridge to do post-graduate work and Joy Hendry suggests that the other reason for MacLean not following in his brother's footsteps is that he may have rejected institutional academicism.³³ This was a rather difficult time for Hugh MacDiarmid also – he had moved to Whalsay, Shetland to live in isolation and MacLean visited him in August 1935.³⁴ In 1937 MacDiarmid came to Raasay. By 1938 MacLean was teaching English at Tobermory Secondary School on Mull and it was here that he was able to view the full extent of the Clearances and how this period in Highland history had affected the people and the culture – this realisation can only have helped to fuel his Socialist ideals.³⁵ The Spanish Civil War had already begun in 1936 and MacLean's urge was to fight against Fascism on the side of the Socialists in the Civil War. In his love poetry *Dàin do Eimhir/ Poems to Eimhir*, he gives the impression that he would chose the love of 'Eimhir' over his duty to fight but in reality it was more for economic reasons that he remained as a teacher.³⁶

It matters little how much of *Dàin do Eimhir* is reality-based. The real importance of this collection of love poems is the impact that it had on the Gaelic world when it was first published in 1943. In his introduction to *An Tuil: Anthology of 20th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse*, Ronald Black writes about the common experience of those who first came into contact with the poems and John MacInnes has written that many people remember where they were when they first opened the book. Its surrealist illustrations by William Crosbie added to the feeling that this was a revolutionary occurrence in the history of Gaelic verse.³⁷ The poems dealt with subject matter that was previously untouched by Gaelic poets. There are echoes of William Ross and 18th Century Gaelic poetry present while at the same time the

³³ Hendry, 1986, p. 17.

³⁴ Hendry, 1986, p. 16.

³⁵ MacLean, 1985, p. 12.

³⁶ Hendry, 1986, p. 21.

³⁷ *An Tuil: Anthology of 20th Century Scottish Gaelic Verse*. ed. by Ronald Black (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1999) p. xxx. See also John MacInnes, 'The Tunes of His Own Mind' in *Sorley MacLean: Poems 1932-82* (Philadelphia: Iona Foundation, 1987), pp. 9-13 (p. 9).

metaphysical is mixed with a Gaelic setting in a thoroughly modern way. *Dàin do Eimhir* is not the only occasion in which MacLean turns to his native landscape for symbols. Poems such as ‘Coilltean Ratharsair’, ‘Screapadal’ and ‘An Cuilithionn’ are closely linked to Raasay and Skye.

‘An Cuilithionn’ was begun by MacLean in the spring of 1939 and was his attempt at a long poem in the same vein as MacDiarmid’s *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*.³⁸ MacLean was in Edinburgh from January 1939 onwards and thus ‘An Cuilithionn’ was started in the city. He was able to keep a close eye on political events and he took up a teaching post at Boroughmuir High School.³⁹ MacLean was able to renew contacts within literary circles during this time and often attended meetings with Robert Garioch at the Abbotsford Bar in Rose Street. Many poets and intellectuals met there including Sydney Goodsir Smith.⁴⁰ It was at this time MacLean and Garioch collaborated on the poetry collection, *Seventeen Poems for Sixpence* which included a section of ‘An Cuilithionn’. Also during this period MacLean got to know Douglas Young who was a gifted classical scholar, a poet and a man of strong political commitment. Michel Byrne stresses the importance of Young in the lives of both MacLean and George Campbell Hay⁴¹ – after Young had completed his first degree at St Andrews he studied at Oxford where he met Hay who was pursuing Classical studies. Both men were committed to leftwing nationalism and before they returned to Scotland they had vowed to uphold a Scottish National Party (SNP) conference resolution to resist conscription in the event of a war.⁴² Young introduced Hay to the poetry of MacDiarmid⁴³ and in 1939 he showed MacDiarmid Hay’s work. MacDiarmid was greatly impressed with the work of the young Gaelic poets and championed their work – he was already looking to Gaelic Scotland for the voice of an authentic Scottish identity so the emergence of the talents of MacLean and Hay came at the right time for him. MacDiarmid was quick to recognise the new talent that was emerging, especially from Gaelic Scotland – by 1940 he was preparing an anthology of

³⁸ MacLean, 1985, p. 12.

³⁹ Hendry, 1986, p. 25

⁴⁰ Hendry, 1986, p. 25.

⁴¹ Michel Byrne, ‘Tails o the Comet? MacLean, Hay, Young and MacDiarmid’s Renaissance’, *ScotLit* 26, Spring 2002. <http://www2.arts.gla.ac.uk/ScotLit/ASLS/Tails_o_the_comet.html> p. 6 {consulted on 9/12/05}.

⁴² *Collected Poems and Songs of George Campbell Hay (Deòrsa Mac Iain Dheòrsa)*, ed. by Michel Byrne (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003) p. 460.

⁴³ Byrne, 2003, p. 455.

poems which were to include Hay, MacLean, Young and Goodsir Smith as well as *Six Scottish Poets* for Hogarth Press which features these four poets alongside Soutar and himself.⁴⁴

When World War II broke out MacLean could not enlist as a volunteer immediately due to family reasons and between October 1939 and June 1940 he taught evacuees in Hawick. During this time Parts III to VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’ were composed. On 26th September 1940 MacLean left Edinburgh for military training at Catterick Camp in Yorkshire and in December 1941 he was sent to Egypt on active service as a member of the Signal Corps.⁴⁵ His experiences of war fuelled many of his poems that were written around this time and while he was overseas Young looked after the manuscripts of *Dàin do Eimhir* and ‘An Cuilithionn’, preparing them for publication and consulting MacLean in his letters about grammar and other queries regarding the poems.⁴⁶ After MacLean was wounded at the Battle of El Alamein in November 1942 he had to recover in military hospital and was eventually discharged from Raigmore Hospital, Inverness in August 1943.⁴⁷ He continued teaching after the war at Boroughmuir High School and in 1946 he married Renee Cameron. They began their life together in Edinburgh and in 1947 he was promoted to Principal of Boroughmuir High School. In February 1956 he moved to Plockton in Wester Ross where he was Headmaster at Plockton High School from 1956 to his retirement in 1972. MacLean did not publish his verse continuously throughout his life and although this may be partly due to the pressures of teaching it may also be connected to his personal view of poetry. According to MacLean himself, he did not believe in art for art’s sake and he only composed poetry when something moved him to the extent that he was compelled to write.⁴⁸ As well as the publication of *Dàin do Eimhir, Reothairt is Contraigh/ Spring tide and Neap tide: Selected poems 1932-72* was published in 1977 and *O Choille gu Bearradh/ From Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems* in 1989. He retired to the Braes district of Skye, was Writer in Residence at Edinburgh University for two years and received Honorary Degrees from seven universities. Sorley MacLean died in 1996. Due to his poetry, twentieth century Gaelic verse can never be viewed as inward looking or even exclusively ‘Scotland-centred’. His symbols provide meanings that

⁴⁴ Byrne, 2002, p. 6.

⁴⁵ Hendry, 1986, p. 27.

⁴⁶ See Acc 6419 Box 38b and MS 29540, National Library of Scotland for the correspondence between Young and MacLean during WWII.

⁴⁷ Hendry, 1986, p. 32.

⁴⁸ MacLean, 1985, p. 13.

are as significant to the rest of Europe as they are to the Highlands and Islands.

In addition to the biographical details already provided, I have set out a timeline below, detailing the composition and publication of ‘An Cuilithionn’ in relation to MacLean’s life and literary career, which spanned the same period.⁴⁹ This is to enable a fuller understanding of the specific context in which MacLean composed ‘An Cuilithionn’, confirming what I have already discussed above and clarifying points which will be expanded throughout the thesis. It should be noted that MacLean composed *Dàin do Eimhir* and ‘An Cuilithionn’ during the same period. However, the publication (in English as well as Gaelic) of *Dàin do Eimhir* was much earlier than ‘An Culithionn’ despite the poems’ parallel composition.

1931	August/September - <i>Dàin do Eimhir</i> I is composed on Raasay.
1932	Summer - <i>Dàin do Eimhir</i> II is composed while MacLean is in Edinburgh.
1934	MacLean takes up his first teaching post at Portree Secondary School, Skye.
1936	November/December - <i>Dàin do Eimhir</i> III is composed while MacLean is in Portree
1938	MacLean takes up a post at Tobermory High School, teaching English.
1938	March/April - <i>Dàin do Eimhir</i> IV is composed while MacLean is teaching in Mull.
1938	Spring - ‘Ann an talla’ lyric (from Part I of ‘An Cuilithionn’) is composed on Mull.
1939	January - MacLean comes to Edinburgh. He takes up a teaching post at Boroughmuir High School.
1939	April/May - MacLean begins to compose ‘An Cuilithionn’ while he is in Edinburgh.
1939	Late May/June - MacLean stops writing ‘An Cuilithionn’ with the conclusion of Part II after a chance meeting with ‘Eimhir’.
1939	September - MacLean composes <i>Dàin do Eimhir</i> V, VI, VII, and VIII while in Edinburgh.

⁴⁹ I have drawn heavily on MacLean’s own dating, which was included in a letter to Douglas Young on March 30th 1942, Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS, and Whyte, 2002, pp. 3-6.

- 1939** **October - June 1940** - MacLean teaches evacuees in Hawick.
- 1939** **Late October/ November** - MacLean resumes composing 'An Cuilithionn' while in Hawick.
- 1939** **Early November** - *Dàin do Eimhir* IX-XVI is composed in Hawick.
- 1939** **Early November-10th December** - MacLean composes *Dàin do Eimhir* XVII-XXII.
- 1939** **10th-13th December** - MacLean composes *Dàin do Eimhir* XXIII.
- 1939** **13th-18th December** - MacLean composes *Dàin do Eimhir* XXIV-XXVII.
- 1939** **20th December** - MacLean composes *Dàin do Eimhir* XXVIII-XXXVI.
- 1939** **By 23rd December** - All parts of 'An Cuilithionn' are completed apart from the 'Cò seo' lyric in Part VII.
- 1940** **1st January** - The 'Cò seo' lyric of 'An Cuilithionn' comes to MacLean in his sleep.
- 1940** **February/March/April** - MacLean composes *Dàin do Eimhir* XXXVII-LV while in Hawick.
- 1940** **26th September** - MacLean enters the Signal Corps and begins his military training at Catterick Camp, Yorkshire.
- 1940** **October** - Douglas Young has a volume with 'An Cuilithionn' typed in Gaelic and English, bound by Jackson of Back Wynd, Aberdeen. It can now be found in the Muniments of St Andrews University Library.
- 1941** *Dàin do Eimhir* LVI is composed early in the year while MacLean is at Catterick Camp.
- 1941** **May-December** - MacLean waits at Catterick Camp for embarkation orders.
- 1941** **11th June** - Douglas Young deposits manuscripts of 'An Cuilithionn', as well as very early transcripts of *Dàin do Eimhir* and 'Coilltean Ratharsair', in Aberdeen University Library.
- 1941** **Late July** - MacLean composes *Dàin do Eimhir* LVII-LIX while in London.
- 1941** **Early September** - *Dàin do Eimhir* LX is composed.
- 1941** **December** - MacLean is sent to Egypt on active service.
- 1942** **November** - MacLean is wounded at the Battle of El Alamein. He recovers in military hospital.

- 1943** **August** - MacLean is discharged from Raigmore Hospital, Inverness.
- 1943** Publication of *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile* (Glasgow: William MacLellan).
- 1946** MacLean marries Renee Cameron.
- 1971** Publication of *Poems to Eimhir translated from the Gaelic by Iain Crichton Smith* (Newcastle on Tyne: Northern House).
- 1977** Publication of *Reothairt is Contraigh [sic]: Taghadh de Dhàin 1932-72/ Spring tide and Neap tide: Selected Poems 1932-72* (Edinburgh: Canongate).
- 1987** **Summer** - The twelve line dedication and Part I 1-90 of ‘An Cuilithionn’ appears in *Chapman* No. 50-51.
- 1988** **Spring** - The remainder of Part I and Part II of ‘An Cuilithionn’ appears in *Chapman* No. 52.
- 1988** **Summer** - Part III of ‘An Cuilithionn’ appears in *Chapman* No. 53.
- 1988** **Autumn** - Part IV and V of ‘An Cuilithionn’ appear in *Chapman* No. 54.
- 1989** **Spring** - Part VI of ‘An Cuilithionn’ appears in *Chapman* No. 55-56.
- 1989** **Summer** - Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’ appears in *Chapman* No. 57.
- 1989** First publication of *O Choille gu Bearradh/ from Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems* (Edinburgh: Carcanet). ‘An Cuilithionn’ was published in its most complete form to date in this collection.
- 1999** *O Choille gu Bearradh* republished by Carcanet/ Birlinn.

1.2 MacLean’s Early Influences

A great many of Sorley MacLean’s literary interests and political beliefs were formed a long time before he went to the University of Edinburgh to study English Language and English Literature. In ‘My Relationship with the Muse’ he recounts how, at the age of 12, ‘I took to the gospel of Socialism’⁵⁰ and that Portree School was where he first became properly

⁵⁰ MacLean, 1985, p. 10.

aware of the Socialist cause.⁵¹ He describes his early view of Socialism as ‘Promethean’ and this is bound up with his distrust of Secederism⁵² since Prometheus is a fallen hero and a sinner and is thus the antithesis of the Calvinist view of the qualities that a good person should have:

Yes, my Promethean view of Socialism is an inversion of the career of the ‘saved’ in the sense that it was a justification of the ‘lost’, ‘damned’ Promethean. I had to find a humanist, hence Promethean, substitute. I have never been on the side of the established angels.⁵³

In this sense, Prometheus is a rebel figure that MacLean was able to couple to his Socialist ideals – the god that brought fire to mankind is also a figure with strong connotations of idealism and this made him an effective vehicle with which the young MacLean could explore his beliefs and early political feelings. In a letter to Douglas Young in 1941 MacLean states ‘I had exactly the same feelings at 13 as I have now. I was as much of a communist then.’⁵⁴ There were family influences in relation to politics that may have aided his interests. He describes how two of his uncles had come into contact ‘with a saint and a hero - John MacLean’ and his uncle in Jordanhill, Alex Nicolson, was described by MacLean as ‘the most intellectual of my relations’ and was a sceptic of Secederism and a Socialist.⁵⁵ His oldest aunt on his father’s side, Peigi, had been a Socialist, a Nationalist and a Suffragette before she became a Tory because of her opinions on World War I. Politics were obviously discussed at length by Peigi and the family because MacLean mentions the ‘fights and arguments’ that ‘would be going on about politics’.⁵⁶

In certain ways his interest in literature was the thing that changed more considerably once he was at university. In his younger days he had been ‘entranced by the peaks of Wordsworth’s ‘Prelude’’⁵⁷ and had a high admiration for Blake and Shelley. He later

⁵¹ Whyte, 2002, p. 142.

⁵² Secederism is a term for the Free Presbyterian Church, which seceded from the Free Church of Scotland in 1893.

⁵³ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

⁵⁴ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS. Perhaps MacLean’s rejection of Secederism helped to fuel his Socialist ideals – he writes to Young that ‘I preferred the multitude of my friends who [were] ‘lost’ to those few who were saved. In fact there was no-one of my own family who on form showed any potentiality for salvation. I disliked many of the obvious ‘elect’ not because of their good fortune, but because most of them were unlovable people and I regarded their preoccupation with salvation much as I regard the careerist at present.’ See Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

⁵⁵ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

⁵⁶ MacLean, 1985, p. 7.

⁵⁷ MacLean, 1985, p. 9.

admitted to Young that his enthusiasm for Shelley was at least partly due to his interest in history and socialism.⁵⁸ James Caird actually goes as far as to say that MacLean reminded him of Shelley with his ‘glowing idealism and passionate commitment to a cause’.⁵⁹ He had also read Keats and Milton and come into contact with Virgil and Horace, while his opinion of Shakespeare was mixed – ‘I disliked Shakespeare except the great tragedies (and I disliked much even of them) but I considered the sonnets the greatest things in all English poetry.’⁶⁰ MacLean had made use of what reading material he could find on Raasay and by the age of 12 he had read Thomas Carlyle’s *French Revolution* and complete histories of Scotland and England.⁶¹ There can be no doubt that this early interest in history fuelled his poetry in later years. However MacLean admits that:

I had read no modern English poetry before I came to Edinburgh University at the age of 17. Although I was still a devotee of Blake and Shelley, my English verse then became more influenced by Donne, Eliot and Pound.⁶²

MacLean arrived in Edinburgh with a strong sense of his own Gaelic oral culture, fuelled by a Socialist outlook perhaps mainly due to the circumstances of his own people during events such as the Clearances, the Battle of the Braes and the emergence of the Land League. He was aware of the Romantics and had been exposed to some Classical writers but much of his literary awakening still had to take place.

1.3 MacLean and Life at the University of Edinburgh (1929-1933)

By his own admission he kept himself to himself in his early years at university. Perhaps he was settling into student life and gaining confidence in his own opinions and ideas – it is perhaps telling that he read a great deal of Gaelic poetry during this time including Alexander MacDonald (Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair), Duncan Bàn MacIntyre and Mary MacLeod.⁶³ It may have been a case of MacLean strengthening his own understanding of literary heritage, and perhaps only when he was sure he could retain his own cultural references did he consciously and fully enter into European literature and properly open himself to other influences. University life was very different from how it is at the present

⁵⁸ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

⁵⁹ J.B. Caird, ‘Sorley MacLean: A Personal View’ in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*. ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 39-43 (p. 39).

⁶⁰ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

⁶¹ Hendry, 1986, p. 11.

⁶² MacLean, 1985, p. 10.

⁶³ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

time. Many more students fully embraced the intellectual opportunities that university afforded. R.S. Silver believes that this may have been partly due to the practical living conditions of students in the early 1930s. Students who did not live nearby and could commute either lived in the very few halls of residence or took lodgings:

I think the psychological ambience of being in lodgings was extremely valuable. You were immediately, in the fashion of the times, Mr So-and-so, since the use of Christian names was not nearly so common as it is now...Most landladies were reasonable about having friends in the evening after you had had your meal.⁶⁴

In his article about student culture in the 1930s Silver describes students who seemed eager to discuss the theories and ideas of the day. He states that it was natural that students made friends with other students who were in lodgings nearby:

We would call on each other after our evening meal, chat for about half an hour, then return to our respective lodgings to work. Sometimes we would meet later in the bar...for a beer (three old pence per half pint) and would perhaps continue an argument in one or other lodgings... Our interests outside individual studies were mainly in argument, theatre going, dance-hall going, and the like, and of course quite voluminous general reading.⁶⁵

It seems that students were often greatly engaged in new literature and politics and were likely to actively explore these avenues. At first MacLean seems to have shunned certain aspects of student life – ‘I went to the Labour club, disliked the minutiae of it, but had a tremendous contempt for the ‘bourgeois decadents’ who crowded the literary societies.’⁶⁶ He seemed at home in the Celtic Society, for while he chose to study English instead of Celtic for economic reasons it is clear that he participated fully in the extra-curricular activities of the Celtic Department. He mentions Carmichael Watson whom he got to know as a fellow student and he writes that ‘James Watson frequently attended the university Celtic Society, in which there were quite a few notable members.’⁶⁷ Two of these members were the Matheson brothers who were Lewismen brought up in North Uist. MacLean enjoyed discussing Gaelic subjects with them:

There will probably never again be the like of Angus, who combined international Celtic scholarship with a phenomenal knowledge of Scottish Gaelic. Even as an undergraduate William had an astounding

⁶⁴ R.S. Silver, ‘Student Culture in the 1930s and Acquaintance with C.M. Grieve’ in *Edinburgh Review* 74, 1986. pp. 63-75 (p. 63).

⁶⁵ Silver, 1986, p. 64.

⁶⁶ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

⁶⁷ MS 29581, NLS, f. 7.

knowledge of Highland history and Gaelic song, and he was always willing to share it with his friends.⁶⁸

However, the Celtic Society involved itself with more than Gaelic. James Caird tells the story of how Sir Oswald Mosley was holding a rally in the Usher Hall one summer evening:

A group of about a dozen members from the Celtic Society of Edinburgh University, including Sorley and myself, went along to the meeting. Most of them were stalwart six-footers. At one point in the proceedings Sorley rose to his feet and asked the question, "What about your socialist pledges?" (Mosley had been a Minister in a Labour Government). Immediately four or five blackshirts materialized at the end of the row in which we were sitting, with the aim of forcibly ejecting Sorley. All the Celtic stalwarts rose to their feet and glared menacingly at the 'stewards', who at once retreated.⁶⁹

MacLean's attitude towards his fellow students in English sometimes comes across as being less than favourable due to his belief that many of them blindly followed Professor Herbert Grierson's ideas about literature.⁷⁰ Grierson was Professor of English while MacLean was at university and was a great admirer of John Donne. MacLean remembers being impressed that James Caird had the courage and originality to admit that he found Milton as great a poet as Donne and Yeats as great a poet as Eliot.⁷¹ MacLean also had his own opinions that did not always follow the majority of undergraduates – 'I refused to give Eliot the twaddling homage of the university literary societies...I think the twaddle of the Grierson days, when no junior member of the University English staff could speak about anything without mentioning Donne, sickened me.'⁷² However, it was probably people's lack of individuality that MacLean disliked and in later years MacLean was quick to praise Grierson saying that he 'was outstanding among the professors of English literature in the British Isles.'⁷³ As a young man MacLean was never ready to follow the crowd in terms of literature and politics. This is clear when his university notebooks and diaries are studied. In one entry dated 2nd October 1932, MacLean recounts an afternoon spent with Dr Black, who was a

⁶⁸ MS 29581, NLS, f. 8.

⁶⁹ Caird, 1986, p. 40. This meeting took place in June 1934. It is a good example of the attitude and political interests of the Celtic Society that MacLean would have encountered.

⁷⁰ MacLean, 1985, p. 10.

⁷¹ MacLean, 1985, p. 11.

⁷² Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

⁷³ MS 29581, NLS, f. 5.

lecturer in the English Department, specialising in literary criticism:

He, quite rightly, thinks that there ought to be more in university life than study. Thus he holds tea and informal discussions in order to promote thought, apparently to give the students a greater interest in the university and to get their point of view. As a matter of fact the main purpose seems to be that of serving an admiring audience who will listen with awe and respect to his opinions.⁷⁴

MacLean seemed less than impressed with his ‘dogmatic’ attitude on subjects ranging from the Irish Free State, Russian literature and Scottish nationalism and perhaps this feeling was heightened with Black’s admission that he had little time for the revival of the Irish and Scottish Gaelic language.⁷⁵ This entry in MacLean’s notebook is very useful in showing MacLean as a young man with strong opinions and the courage to argue points and hold his own in discussions. He seems to be testing out Black during this meeting by becoming ‘eloquent as is my wont, in attacking ideas with which I really sympathise.’⁷⁶ He writes that he ‘held forth against the crushing materialism of Soviet Russia (as if there were no ideals invalued [sic] there as well’.⁷⁷ These early notebooks give an insight into, not only MacLean’s own character with his dry wit and rebellious streak, but also the intellectual climate of the university in which wide ranging subjects might be covered in the space of one night by older conservative lecturers and their younger students who were exploring new viewpoints and ideas. Incidentally, MacLean also shows that he is willing to change his opinions of someone when he writes another entry on 19th November 1932:

Yesterday we had tea with Black again. I am inclined to think I was too hard on him last time – he really seems quite decent. Of course he is accustomed to lecturing...However he showed himself rather broader minded this time...⁷⁸

If MacLean’s own memory of dates is accurate it was not long after these notes were made that he met two people who were to play an important part in his life. MacLean writes that he first met James Caird in 1933. Caird’s friend, George Davie, introduced them⁷⁹ and it is fair to suppose that these young men heralded the start of an important time of intellectual development for MacLean in which he crossed from being an undergraduate to a young man

⁷⁴ MS 29621, NLS, f. 29.

⁷⁵ MS 29621, NLS, f. 31.

⁷⁶ MS 29621, NLS, f. 32.

⁷⁷ MS 29621, NLS, f. 32.

⁷⁸ MS 29621, NLS, f. 49.

⁷⁹ Caird, 1986, p. 39.

whose literary and political ideas, as they became fully formed, would shape his own future work. He did not meet them until his last term at Edinburgh University but he got to know both men well when he studied at Moray House for a year. It is clear that Davie and Caird made a significant impression on MacLean. Years later MacLean marvelled at Davie's 'colossal logical memory, his intellectual passion, and his ability to see Scotland whole and its place in the great world of thought and society.'⁸⁰ Davie's main interest was in philosophy while Caird specialised in European literature. It was during this time that many people were exploring the notion of the self within philosophical systems, with its divisions of the mind and spirit, and it is likely that these men would have been open to this sort of discussion – the influences of Freudian and Jungian psychoanalysis, alongside the philosophical theories of the likes of Descartes, Hume, Locke, and Kant may have had an impact on young intellectuals and affected the way in which identity was portrayed in literature. Certainly, writers such as Eliot and the French Symbolists were opening up the possibilities of how identity could be represented and deciphered. The idea of the self - mind, body and spirit - was a significant idea and one that was unavoidable for any literary minded intellectual in the twentieth century. This subject had been a matter of debate since the Romantic poets had presented the idea of the 'divided self' – poets were faced with the paradox of the man of action and inaction especially after the Romantics had developed the concept of introspection and placed a greater emphasis on subjectivity.⁸¹ MacLean, Davie and Caird were aware of the work of the Romantics and thus the various philosophies of the self would have been of interest to them also. MacLean wrote that he was greatly impressed by Caird's vast knowledge of literature and his independent opinions on the subject.⁸²

From memoirs and reminiscences of the period it is obvious that Davie, Caird and MacLean enjoyed discussions about politics such as the situation in Ireland as well as literary discussions – 'As for literature, we ranged widely over Greek, Latin, French, English and Scottish poetry. Coming to more modern times we talked about Yeats, Eliot, Valéry, Pound, Lawrence, MacDiarmid, and the emerging MacSpaundy group...'⁸³ Caird observed that MacLean's

glowing idealism and passionate commitment to a cause reminded one of Shelley,

⁸⁰ MS 29581, NLS, f. 9.

⁸¹ See Charles J. Rzepka, *The Self as Mind: Vision and Identity in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Keats* (London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 2.

⁸² MS 29581, NLS, f. 3.

⁸³ Caird, 1986, p. 40.

particularly the Shelley of 'Prometheus Unbound', who, indeed, was one of the earliest influences on his development. When he was aflame with enthusiasm for an idea or a poem, he was one of the most eloquent people I have ever met.⁸⁴

Prometheus could be viewed as a symbol of striving for the almost unattainable potential of mankind. MacLean was starting to explore this concept and this understandably led on to questions regarding absolutes and ultimate truths, especially when different political stances and theories were being discussed within his group of friends. The idea of the absolute is dealt with in 'An Cuilithionn' but its beginnings can be seen in MacLean's university days in which literature was discussed at length among Davie, Caird and himself. Caird remembers that they were especially interested in the poetry of W.B. Yeats, and in particular with Yeats's 'anguished lyricism' which came from his despairing love for Maud Gonne.⁸⁵ This may have influenced MacLean's vision of the ideal – the feeling that something unattainable is just beyond one's grasp. Even an account of a dream that he had had in 1932 shows that this subject was obviously playing on his mind. He writes in a notebook that he dreamt that he was on a ship (which he attributes to a recent excursion on a steamer on Loch Fyne a few weeks before):

When we were moving away from the land, a blinding shaft of light seemed to gleam on a low rocky shore. For one moment it lit up the figure of a girl who was alone. I did not have any realization of her identity. She seemed merely to be a flash of emotion, an embodiment of a feeling within my heart. Dreams are often concrete thought and emotion, a vague realization of what cannot be perceived by all the senses.⁸⁶

While a dream cannot be used as a definitive account of a person's ideas, this dream, which MacLean obviously felt strongly enough about to write down in great detail, seems to illustrate his need to grasp an ideal. The pure emotion becomes concrete and symbolises hope and striving. This is a theme that MacLean explores more fully later on in 'An Cuilithionn'.

One of the striking points of this group of friends was their awareness of Scotland's place within a wider European spectrum. They were definitely not narrow-minded and were able to see Scotland as part of a greater whole. George Davie's book, *The Democratic Intellect* (1961), shows this clearly with its study of Scottish universities and their struggle to keep

⁸⁴ Caird, 1986, p. 39.

⁸⁵ Caird, 1986, p. 40.

⁸⁶ MS 29621, NLS, f. 25.

Scotland's independent intellectual tradition against its neighbour England. Hugh MacDiarmid was also interested in Davie's philosophy and it informed some of the ideas in his poetry.⁸⁷ This group of students had a lot to talk about since they were the promising intellectuals of their day who had a grasp of what the recent Scottish Literary Renaissance had meant for Scotland and they were also interested in how the political climate of the thirties might affect the country. They had an understanding of the recent literary past and present and they were perhaps not altogether unaware of their possible place in its future.

1.4 MacDiarmid: The Literary Renaissance and Scottish Nationalism

It was Davie and Caird who introduced MacLean to Hugh MacDiarmid's work⁸⁸ and this period of MacLean's life, in which he finished university and entered into literary and intellectual circles, should not be underestimated for its importance on MacLean's emerging sense of identity as a poet. MacDiarmid was a central figure of the literary scene and younger men such as Davie and Caird were fully aware of his importance even though MacDiarmid had not been so readily accepted by the Establishment. MacDiarmid's early career as a poet and writer is associated with issues of national identity and Scottish literature, dating to well before the time that MacLean and his friends knew him. In order to understand MacDiarmid, the context from which he emerged must be fully understood.

National identity had been a cause for concern for politicians as well as literary minded intellectuals for some considerable time. After the First World War Scotland had found itself struggling economically and Scottish industrialists were slow to respond to the problem of structural imbalance.⁸⁹ During the 1920s the country's economy seemed to be slipping out of the hands of Scottish businessmen and it was this climate of recession and the oncoming Depression of 1929 that fuelled middle-class resentment and which began to take on a nationalist air.⁹⁰ There had been attempts to reduce Scotland's dependence on struggling industries such as steel and shipbuilding by encouraging new light industries in the Central Belt but it was only the prospect of war which helped Scotland's shipbuilding industry to

⁸⁷ Hendry, 1986, p. 13.

⁸⁸ Caird, 1986, p. 39.

⁸⁹ Richard J. Finlay, 'National Identity in Crisis: Politicians, Intellectuals and the 'End of Scotland', 1920-1939' in *History* Vol. 79, 1994, pp. 242-259 (p. 243).

⁹⁰ Finlay, 1994, p. 245.

recover and re-armament in the late 1930s went some way towards helping the situation.⁹¹ However, nationalist feeling can be traced back further, at least in relation to cultural nationalists.

The Scots National League (SNL) was formed in 1920 in London and had its early beginnings in ‘Celtic Romanticism’ as well as links with Gaelic culture since most of its members were Gaelic speakers with affiliations to the Highland Land League and other Gaelic cultural organisations.⁹² The two principal leaders of the SNL were William Gillies and Stuart R. Erskine of Mar with whom MacDiarmid was to associate closely in the late 1920s. Erskine believed that the growth of Irish nationalism could be reciprocated by a similar movement in Scotland⁹³ – there can be no doubt that events in Ireland such as the Easter Rising in 1916 and the emergence of the Free State in 1922 affected these people’s thinking about the situation in Scotland. A feeling of rebellion was in the air and men such as Gillies and Erskine wanted to emulate Ireland’s successes, thus organisations like the SNL precipitated a national party in Scotland.⁹⁴ In the 1920s the pre-war Home Rule All Round policy was in demise and in 1928 the defeat of Barr’s Home Rule bill⁹⁵ led to the end of the Scottish Home Rule Association.⁹⁶ Perhaps partly due to this, the National Party of Scotland (NPS) emerged at this time, although Richard Finlay points out that it was ‘not born in a blaze of glory’ due to procrastination by members of all the interested organisations and instead had a rather slow and painful birth.⁹⁷ This new party had a gifted orator in John MacCormick, who was to play an important part in the national movement for the next twenty years. He had gathered a group of young men known as the Glasgow University Scottish Nationalist Association and they were especially influential in the creation of the NPS.⁹⁸

Cultural rebirth was happening at the same time as these political changes in Scotland.

⁹¹ Byrne, 2003, p. 458.

⁹² Richard J. Finlay, *Independent and Free: Scottish Politics and the Origins of the Scottish National Party 1918-1945* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1994) pp. 29-30.

⁹³ Finlay, 1994, p. 31.

⁹⁴ Finlay, 1994, p. 29.

⁹⁵ Rev. James Barr (1862-1949) was a British Labour Party politician, Socialist and pacifist.

⁹⁶ H.J. Hanham, *Scottish Nationalism* (London: Faber, 1969) p. 157.

⁹⁷ Finlay, 1994, p. 73.

⁹⁸ Finlay, 1994, p. 72.

MacDiarmid was to play a major role in this to such an extent that his name has become synonymous with the Scottish Literary Renaissance. He viewed the cultural revival as being intrinsic to the struggle for a separate political identity:

Nationalism in Scotland has always existed as a sentiment, and because of this men have not felt the need of a cultural renaissance...The cultural renaissance – the struggle for national language, literature and religion - always precedes the national, although it is the consciousness of nationalism which makes the cultural renaissance possible.⁹⁹

He argued that ‘in any national movement politics are a very subsidiary matter – effects not causes.’¹⁰⁰ He felt that if a national consciousness could be developed the political institutions that were in variance with it would naturally alter.¹⁰¹ MacDiarmid concentrated on bringing to the fore a distinctively Scottish poetry written in Scots. The effect his poetry had on Scottish identity was of major significance but it is also important to see MacDiarmid as a writer who had a major influence on the type of literary journals which appeared in Scotland in the late 1920s and the 1930s. It was this effort to publish other poets’ work as well as to discuss nationalist politics that greatly aided the emergence of a distinctively Scottish cultural identity. For MacDiarmid ‘political and economic independence is valueless unless it encourages the growth of a vigorous national culture.’¹⁰² Thus, he assisted a revival in order to

place the soul of our nation in relation to the fundamental facts of life, to express in terms of destiny the *Weltanschauung* of the Scottish people, and plant it deeper in the soil of mystery, myth, history and prehistory.¹⁰³

In November 1920 MacDiarmid became known in the literary world as the editor of the anthology *Northern Numbers*, which produced three volumes of poetry by the likes of Neil Munro, John Buchan, Helen B. Cruickshank, Lewis Spence and William Soutar.¹⁰⁴ On 26th August 1922 the *Scottish Chapbook* first appeared. It was edited and published by MacDiarmid and was advertised under the slogan ‘Not tradition – Precedents!’ Its aims included:

To encourage and publish the work of contemporary Scottish poets and dramatists, whether in English, Gaelic or Braid Scots.

⁹⁹ Duncan Glen, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Scottish Renaissance* (Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers Ltd, 1964) p. 52.

¹⁰⁰ Glen, 1964, p. 53.

¹⁰¹ Glen, 1964, p. 53.

¹⁰² MacDiarmid quoted in Glen, 1964, p. 53.

¹⁰³ Glen, 1964, p. 53.

¹⁰⁴ Glen, 1964, p. 71

To insist upon truer evaluations of the work of Scottish writers than are usually given in the present over-Anglicised condition of British literary journalism, and, in criticism, elucidate, apply, and develop the distinctively Scottish range of values.

To bring Scottish Literature into closer touch with current European tendencies in technique and ideation.¹⁰⁵

A great many of the contributions in the *Chapbook* were submitted by MacDiarmid himself. Other publications founded by MacDiarmid followed on from this – the *Scottish Nation* in 1923 and the *Northern Review* – and he also contributed to other publications such as the *New Age*, of which he was literary editor.¹⁰⁶ Throughout the late 1920s he was writing renaissance and nationalist propaganda for anyone who would print it.¹⁰⁷ In June 1925 he carried out a revaluation of modern Scottish literature and culture in the *Scottish Educational Journal*.¹⁰⁸ The opinions that he put forward in these publications did not necessarily please the Establishment.

MacDiarmid's involvement with politics as well as cultural and literary subjects did not sit well with the more straightforward political nationalists since they feared nationalist politics that favoured the poetic might not be taken seriously within the political arena and could be used against them. This concern is valid when the Duke of Montrose's comments are considered:

It happened that about four years ago a small body of enthusiasts decided to form a party – or rather, an amalgamation of small existing groups – into the Scottish National Party [sic]. In their early days, the Nationalists were largely swayed by idealism. Novelists, essayists and poets, rather than businessmen, were found in their ranks... Other extravagances, such as 'separation from England', 'kilted sailors in Scottish ships', and 'Gaelic speaking ambassadors', got mixed up with their utopian ideals, and certainly put off much support which the Party's energy and enterprise would otherwise have obtained.¹⁰⁹

The NPS was trying to attract mainstream moderate opinions and consolidate the party's

¹⁰⁵ Glen, 1964, p. 74.

¹⁰⁶ Glen, 1964, p. 101.

¹⁰⁷ Glen, 1964, p. 101.

¹⁰⁸ Glen, 1964, p. 94.

¹⁰⁹ Finlay, 1964, p. 132.

financial base.¹¹⁰ MacCormick wanted to distance the NPS from ‘colourful radicals’ and avoid the literary-intellectual circles.¹¹¹ He also courted liberal and unionist opinion and this did not please the more radical party supporters, especially when he tried to seek rapprochement with the Scottish Party, another organisation, formed in 1932, with more moderate aims and the more rightwing leadership of the Duke of Montrose, Sir Alexander MacEwen, and Professor Dewar Gibb.¹¹² In 1933 the NPS officially moderated its aims and expelled extreme members such as Grieve, Angus Clark and W.D. McColl.¹¹³ In April 1934 the NPS merged with the Scottish Party and became the Scottish National Party.¹¹⁴ MacDiarmid began to lose faith at this time with the ‘official’ nationalist movement with its strong bourgeois affinities¹¹⁵ – he was not prepared to align himself with official ideology if he did not agree with it and was by this time advocating the gospel of Socialism as a legitimate way forward for mankind. For this reason he never had a firm place within the SNP or the Communist Party, preferring first and foremost, to be a man true to his own ideals. His allegiance to Communist principles led many cultural and political Scottish nationalists to see him as betrayer of the movement which he had done so much to encourage, with Compton MacKenzie appealing to him in 1952 to ‘return, single-hearted, to the cause he more than any man alive has inspired.’¹¹⁶ MacDiarmid’s attempt to align opposites – in this case Nationalism and Communism – is at least in keeping with his literary philosophy of the Caledonian Antisyzygy which he adapted from Gregory Smith.¹¹⁷ The ‘jostling of contraries’ is what provides the vigour and dynamism needed in any cultural or literary movement¹¹⁸ and is a theme which is explored in detail in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* – the poem

¹¹⁰ Finlay, 1994, p. 157.

¹¹¹ Finlay, 1994, p. 157.

¹¹² Glen, 1964, p. 47.

¹¹³ Glen, 1964, p. 47.

¹¹⁴ Glen, 1964, p. 47.

¹¹⁵ Glen, 1964, p. 50.

¹¹⁶ Glen, 1964, p. 131.

¹¹⁷ In the words of Smith: ‘Does literature anywhere, of this small compass, show such a mixture of contraries as his [the Scot] in outlook, subject, and method, real life and romance, everyday fact and the supernatural, things holy and things profane...thistles and thistledown?...The sudden jostling of contraries seems to preclude any relationship by literary suggestion. The one invades the other without warning. They are the “polar twins” of the Scottish Muse.’ Kenneth Buthlay, *Hugh MacDiarmid (C.M. Grieve)*. (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1982). p. 44.

¹¹⁸ Glen, 1964, p. 54.

published in 1926 which was viewed as a landmark in Scottish literature and in which MacDiarmid attacks the Scottish Establishment and then attempts to define the Scottish character.

1.5 Socialism and Scotland

The other major intellectual force, which writers and poets were aware of during the 1920s and 1930s was Socialism. Hugh MacDiarmid's poetry, as well as having a nationalist agenda, can also be viewed as distinctively left-wing in tone¹¹⁹ and a little later, Lewis Grassie Gibbon, amongst others, was reflecting on Socialist issues from a specifically Scottish standpoint through characters such as Chris Guthrie and Chae Strachan.¹²⁰ Many of the Scottish intelligentsia were left-wing in their political vision. R.S. Silver shows that students during the 1930s such as himself, were looking towards Europe for inspiration and were taking an internationalist stance for this reason. He writes:

I think that my Wellsian outlook was really based on an unconscious assumption that the World Government of the future would be characterised by the kindly, couthy, Scots attitudes which I knew at the heart of my own folk. In short I was reading and interpreting my Wells and Shaw, and Strachey and Marx and Engels, and MacNeice and Spender, with a Scots accent!¹²¹

For many of the Scottish intelligentsia and students at the Scottish universities, extreme left-wing views were very fashionable, perhaps in some cases because of, rather in spite of, its slightly dangerous connotations. Silver offers an interesting explanation for at least some of the students with communist leanings when he writes:

More importantly, I had begun to notice, during my years from 1936 to 1939 at Ardeer, when much argument prevailed about the events in Spain, an at first-sight surprising tendency for the English public school-type to favour communism if they were leftist at all. I was to confirm this impression in later years which I spent in England, and to realise it was not in fact surprising but followed naturally from their authoritarian outlook.¹²²

Scottish students caught up in the passionate idealism of the late 1930s joined the

¹¹⁹ See *Hugh MacDiarmid: Complete Poems 1920-1976*, Vol I ed. by Michael Grieve and W.R. Aitken (London: Martin Brian and O'Keeffe, 1978), specifically the poems in the collections *First Hymn to Lenin* and *Second Hymn to Lenin*.

¹²⁰ Lewis Grassie Gibbon, *Sunset Song* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1988). It was first published in 1932.

¹²¹ Silver, 1986, pp. 68-69.

¹²² Silver, 1986, p. 70.

communists going out to fight on the side of the Republicans during the Spanish Civil War and buses picked up people in Edinburgh and Glasgow for this specific purpose. MacLean himself expressed a desire to fight in the Spanish Civil War. However, this idealism, which was fuelled by poets and writers also stemmed from real issues in Scotland at this time. After the First World War the social and economic consequences of Scotland's narrow industrial base could be easily seen. The Clyde shipbuilding industry suffered greatly during the Great Depression and Lloyd George's promise that the soldiers of the Great War would return to a land fit for heroes had come to nothing.¹²³ On 27th January 1919, 40,000 Glasgow workers went on strike to support the demand for a thirty hour week in order to prevent mass unemployment after the war. The Secretary of State for Scotland, Robert Munro, was worried about events in Russia and believed that the strike was a preamble to a Bolshevik rising. Lloyd George deployed 12,000 troops with army lorries and tanks to Glasgow. On 31st January 1919 another crowd rallied in George Square and arrests were made. The strike also spread to Sheffield and Belfast.¹²⁴

John MacLean is synonymous with 'Red Clydeside', and while he was an inspirational figure to the workers, for the Government at Westminster he symbolised the danger of Bolshevism that was thought to be threatening Britain. In 1918 he attempted to turn Glasgow's Trade Council into a Scottish Soviet. The Russian Bolsheviks appointed him their consul in Scotland. Later in his life he was part of the Scottish Workers Republican Party, blending Marxism with the ideas of Ireland's Sinn Fein.¹²⁵ However, the left-wing movement was far from unified in their vision for Scotland. John MacLean refused to join the British Communist Party because he felt that its centralised structure was not applicable to the Scottish tradition. MacLean was organising 3500 unemployed people in Glasgow City Hall twice a week in 1921 to discuss principles and tactics of Marxist ideology in relation to their situation. These meetings grew into the National Unemployed Workers Movement.¹²⁶

Other communists were intent on infiltrating the Labour movement. While the Labour Party refused to allow the Communist Party affiliation, individual members could belong to the Party and also become Labour MPs. Scaremongering from the Conservatives and the tabloid

¹²³ Tom Steel, *Scotland's Story*. (London: HarperCollins, 1994). p. 344. See also Richard Finlay, *Modern Scotland: 1914-2000*. (London: Profile, 2004).

¹²⁴ Steel, 1994, p. 345.

¹²⁵ Steel, 1994, p. 345.

¹²⁶ Steel, 1994, p. 346.

press helped to defeat the Labour Government in 1924 and shows how afraid many politicians were of the communist threat. This attitude continued up to World War II and afterwards.¹²⁷ The Independent Labour Party (ILP) had at its heart Socialist idealism, and when Ramsay MacDonald formed Labour's second government in 1929 he excluded most of the ILP from high office. Hostility from the ILP as well as the desperate economic situation, forced MacDonald to resign in April 1931 and form a National Government with the Conservatives and the Liberals.¹²⁸ According to Silver, the difficulties continued well into the 1930s:

It has to be remembered that during the years before 1939 and particularly during the years of the Spanish Civil War, there were deep and bitter divisions between not only the Labour Party and the extreme left, but also between the two main sections of the far left, the CP and the ILP.¹²⁹

One point which is important to note is that there was not necessarily a major gap in beliefs and ideas between the workers and the writers and poets in Scotland. Many students at university came from working class backgrounds and thus exchange of ideas was naturally possible.¹³⁰ It was within this climate that MacLean was composing his poetry and exploring the interplay between a nationalist and internationalist vision. While nationalism nevertheless has its place in MacLean's poetry, especially in relation to his sense of Gaeldom, the left-wing ideas of those such as John MacLean could not fail to have an effect on him, and gave him a Scottish view of the writings of Marx and Lenin. Certainly in 'An Cuilithionn' it is the Socialist vision which predominates and this will be discussed further in Chapter 7 of the thesis.

1.6 MacLean and the Influence of MacDiarmid

Although MacLean claims that he met George Davie and James Caird in 1933 and that they introduced him to MacDiarmid's work, he must have already been familiar with MacDiarmid as a figure on the Scottish scene because in a notebook he recounts how in October 1932 he attended a meeting in the Greek classroom of the university in which MacDiarmid was speaking on behalf of Dr MacGillivray, who was a candidate for the rectorship.¹³¹ MacLean

¹²⁷ Steel, 1994, p. 352.

¹²⁸ Steel, 1994, p. 353.

¹²⁹ Silver, 1986, p. 70.

¹³⁰ Silver, 1986, p. 67.

¹³¹ The Dr MacGillivray that MacLean writes about is Dr Pittendrigh MacGillivray (1856-1938). He was a friend of MacDiarmid's and was the only person other than F.G. Scott who had been fully familiar with *A Drunk*

reveals quite a detailed knowledge of MacDiarmid's background, stating that he had 'had a time of it recently. He has been divorced, he is terribly poor – he will not write down to the taste of the mob or sacrifice his convictions to material advancement.'¹³² He goes on to show knowledge of MacDiarmid's dealings with both the National Party and the Communist Party but it is MacLean's rich evocation of the meeting that makes this notebook entry so interesting. Supporters of the other candidate, 'Sir Sam Hamilton', were clearly not pleased to hear MacDiarmid's views and they made their feelings obvious:

Immediately [MacDiarmid] began to speak he was greeted with a chorus of 'rasps'. His remarks could scarcely be heard for the vulgar and unmannerly noise the majority of the audience made...[MacDiarmid] listened with a smile on his face, then proceeded. His good humour and self control [was memorable?] in the face of the insulting treatment he received. His supporters were definitely in the minority. The main body of the audience consisted of an ungentlemanly rabble of stupid and vacant-minded, coarse-grained, vulgar medical students – typical representatives of the Scottish 'bourgeoisie'.¹³³

In this episode MacLean's admiration for MacDiarmid can be glimpsed – this in fact may be one of the first situations in which MacLean was able to observe the older poet. As well as this it is clear that by 1932 MacLean was exposing himself to settings in which people were prepared to stand up and fight for their ideals and that being a specifically Scottish intellectual did not automatically mean that a person was to be accepted within his own home territory, even by other Scottish intellectuals. MacLean observes that MacDiarmid was a poet with a conception of 'the role of Scotland in modern affairs'¹³⁴ and yet who was opposed by his fellow countrymen. He was 'a man who had suffered much for his ideals'¹³⁵ and this is something that would become an important theme later in the 1930s in MacLean's poem, 'An Cuilithionn'. MacLean acknowledges in the account of the meeting that 'the situation was strange. It seems that all men who are true to their ideals in Scotland must encounter opposition.'¹³⁶ It was perhaps MacDiarmid's passionate conviction that impressed MacLean

Man Looks at the Thistle prior to its publication. He was also a contributor to the *Scottish Chapbook*, writing poems in English and regional Scots. MacDiarmid had written about him in the *Scottish Nation*, discussing his work as a sculptor on 9th Oct 1923 and his work as a poet on 16th Oct of the same year. MacGillivray was the King's Sculptor in Ordinary from 1921 and was well known for works such as the Burns statue in Irvine and the Byron statue in Aberdeen. According to Alan Bold, MacDiarmid considered MacGillivray as one of the few serious vernacular poets since Burns and viewed him as an 'expansively romantic figure, a patriotic Scot of integrity.' Bold, 1988, p. 156, p. 187.

¹³² MS 29621, NLS, f. 34.

¹³³ MS 29621, NLS, f. 35.

¹³⁴ MS 29621, NLS, f. 36.

¹³⁵ MS 29621, NLS, f. 36.

¹³⁶ MS 29621, NLS, f. 36.

so much. He first met MacDiarmid in 1934 and they immediately struck up a friendship. They respected each other's work and MacDiarmid was especially interested in MacLean's knowledge of Gaelic song and tradition since by this point in his work he had moved away from Scots and was looking at Ireland and Gaelic Scotland as the hope for Scotland's identity and continuing resurgence. MacDiarmid and MacLean co-operated on the translation of 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' by Alexander MacDonald and Duncan Bàn MacIntyre's 'Moladh Beinn Dóbhraín'.¹³⁷ MacLean learned much from MacDiarmid regarding the long poem. Although he at first rated the lyrical poems of MacDiarmid higher, he came to fully appreciate the likes of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* as time went on, saying 'It converted me to the belief that the long medley with lyric peaks was the form for our age.'¹³⁸ This attitude no doubt influenced MacLean's work, especially in relation to the composition of 'An Cuilithionn', which MacLean dedicated to MacDiarmid and Alexander MacDonald.¹³⁹

Discussion regarding the long poem as a literary form was generated when MacLean circulated 'An Cuilithionn' amongst his friends in the early months of 1940. In a draft of an introduction that was planned to go alongside 'An Cuilithionn' when it was published Young writes:

This composition is named after the Coolin range of mountains in the island of Skye, seen from Sorley's home in Raasay, and the variety of that range is represented in the bewildering variety of matters and styles in this poem: vividly stimulating presentations of the sensations of mountaineering, tirades of impassioned satire, flights of jocular fantasy, brilliant 'tours de force' of parody, tracts of picturesque narrative, dramatic scenes of heart-moving poignancy, lyrics of marvellous complexity and power in melody and rhythm, and, to end all, in the Seventh Movement a culmination of passionate prophetic mystical intensity.¹⁴⁰

In this passage Young shows that he has grasped the idea that 'An Cuilithionn' spans many different forms and styles, reminiscent of *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* in which MacDiarmid presents longer poems in various metrical forms in order to achieve a 'stream of consciousness' that was a newly available technique made famous by the modernist, James Joyce. In his introduction Young hints that George Davie is more restrained in his description of 'An Cuilithionn' – 'Sorley's philosopher friend George Davie describes it dry-as-dustily as "a long opinionative rant, interspersed with lyrics"¹⁴¹ - while MacDiarmid grasps the vision

¹³⁷ Hendry, 1986, p. 16.

¹³⁸ MacLean, 1985, p. 11.

¹³⁹ See MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

¹⁴⁰ MS 29561, NLS, f. 1

¹⁴¹ MS 29561, NLS, f. 1

behind its conception:

Christopher Grieve, to whom it is dedicated, (jointly with the eighteenth-century patriot-poet Alexander MacDonald), writes of it as “a great anti-imperialist and Marxist poem”, which “sees the wild peaks of the Cuillin in terms of the endless struggles of mankind and is not only a magnificent evocation of the Hebridean landscape but of the whole tumult of history and human hope, for the past sees not only the superficialities of the scene, and not only the local history of which these Skye hills have been the theatre, but the entire perspective of human history, of which they provide such a tortured and towering symbol.”¹⁴²

It may be that the long poem as literary form was something which poets and intellectuals were experimenting with, hence the mixed response. Certainly, in Davie’s letters to MacLean he is encouraging about ‘An Cuilithionn’, writing that ‘Without question, your poem is the most important event in Scots literature since the advent of Grieve in the Scottish Chapbook.’¹⁴³ There appears to have been debate about MacLean’s use of factual information alongside his more lyric pieces in the poem. Davie writes to MacLean of a conversation regarding ‘An Cuilithionn’ that he had had with the composer F.G. Scott. Scott’s view appears to have been that the realism present in the poem must have ‘a complexity of reaction even outdoing the work of the mystical idealists – however realist the basis was.’¹⁴⁴ Davie’s wife Janice seems to have had reservations about MacLean’s more factual passages, namely Part VI. Davie writes:

She exhibits a sort of high-track mind, and doesn’t see the point of a semi-factual passage like VI. Yet plain speaking is never impressive except it be accompanied by evidence for its assertions...¹⁴⁵

Davie notes that the lyric parts such as the Stallion section and the love lyric to Skye, which he describes as the ‘high spots’ of the poem, are the parts in which MacLean’s poetry is at its most ‘Gaelic’.¹⁴⁶ This is an interesting statement since it insinuates that MacLean’s search for the lyrical cry is best exemplified when he uses specifically Gaelic forms of verse. This would correspond with MacLean’s own criticism and writings in which he explores the Gaelic old songs, for which he had a great amount of reverence due to their heightened

¹⁴² MS 29561, NLS, f. 2

¹⁴³ MS 29501, NLS, f. 8.

¹⁴⁴ MS 29501, NLS, f. 12.

¹⁴⁵ MS 29501, NLS, f. 9.

¹⁴⁶ MS 29501, NLS, f. 8.

emotion in relation to realistic as opposed to far-fetched events.¹⁴⁷ His love of the old songs was bound up with the music that could not be separated from them. He writes ‘I believe that there has never been a great song that is not a great poem too, and I believe with Croce that all poetry is ‘lyrical’, that verse now and again, but rarely, arrives at a point which it utters the ‘lyrical cry’.¹⁴⁸ Thus, MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’ could be described as a Modernist experiment in Gaelic poetry in which the old songs were used as a major influence and this may be why much of ‘An Cuilithionn’ is both personal and political at the same time – MacLean is using the heightened emotion of events such as political problems in Europe to generate a personal and realistic response within the poem. MacLean’s connection with music and lyric is why Young’s description of ‘An Cuilithionn’ is so fitting:

A musical analogy may be more enlightening. It is not like a symphony, for it has not the ordered structure of a symphony. It is more like an overture, in which the leading themes of the opera are succinctly displayed. If so, to carry on the analogy, the opera to this overture will have to be all Sorley’s unwritten poems.¹⁴⁹

Young exhibits an understanding of MacLean’s work and sensitivity to his ideals and vision. He acknowledges MacLean’s idealism in a letter, writing that ‘you have a desire for the absolute and the universal, which characterises the higher human types...’¹⁵⁰ This discussion of ideals would resonate all through the next decade when Young and George Campbell Hay refused to take part in the war for political reasons and MacLean had to struggle with his own loyalty to his Communist ideals while fighting Fascism by joining the army.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have provided a brief account of MacLean’s life before focussing on his influences during childhood and early adulthood. In particular, I have highlighted the role which Davie, Caird, Young and MacDiarmid played in MacLean’s life before and during the composition of ‘An Cuilithionn’. Some of the ideals which these men held and the discussions that such ideals generated informed MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’. The main purpose of this chapter was to introduce themes which will be examined at length in later chapters of this thesis.

¹⁴⁷ Sorley MacLean, ‘Realism in Gaelic Poetry’ in *Ris a’ Bhruthaich: The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley MacLean*. ed. by William Gillies (Stornoway: Acair Ltd, 1985) pp. 15-47 (p. 18).

¹⁴⁸ Sorley MacLean, 1985, p. 106.

¹⁴⁹ MS 29561, NLS, f. 3

¹⁵⁰ MS 29540, NLS, f. 9.

Chapter 2

Sources

Introduction

This chapter deals with the sources which are of most significance to ‘An Cuilithionn’, including an outline of the poem itself, MacLean’s correspondence and his own critical essays as well as the work which has been conducted on MacLean by other scholars. The chapter will provide an overview of the research already conducted on Sorley MacLean and will highlight areas in the field where research is lacking.

2.1 An Outline of ‘An Cuilithionn’

According to Sorley MacLean ‘An Cuilithionn’ was ‘meant to be a very long poem radiating from Skye and the West Highlands to the whole of Europe’.¹⁵¹ Composed in seven parts, its general theme is the struggle of mankind against oppression and is taken from the standpoint of the poet as climber on the Cuillin who has the visionary power with which to survey the whole of the world throughout history. For most of the poem it is MacLean himself who is the voice of the speaker. As the poem evolves his visionary scope widens to take in places far removed from Skye. Different voices and images mingle and co-exist until the climax of Part VII is reached.

‘An Cuilithionn’ begins with a short introduction in which MacLean dedicates his poem to Hugh MacDiarmid and Alexander MacDonald (Alastair mac Mhaighstir Alastair). Part I starts with the Cuillin being brought sharply into focus as the main image. The speaker praises Sgurr nan Gillean and as a climber, establishes a personal relationship with the mountain. Ascending the mountain from the corrie the struggle of the climber becomes an initiation as he mirrors the shape of the mountain and moulds himself to it in what can be viewed as a psycho-sexual relationship with it. As the ascent continues the speaker begins to give an account of the sights from the side of the Cuillin. The Skye poet, Màiri Mhór, is invoked and there are mentions of exploitation, exile, clearance, and loss at the hands of

¹⁵¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 63.

capitalist landlords – this seems to be a fusion of both the poet’s own experience in the shape of oral history, and the events as described in Màiri Mhór’s poetry. The Glendale men and the Braes of Clan Nicol - the first figures of resistance and rebellion in ‘An Cuilithionn’ – are mentioned and further strengthen the theme of Skye history. The speaker continues to circle the Cuillin and the land is described as crying out, thus beginning to take on the emotion of the oppressed people. Echoing this, Màiri Mhór and Neil MacLeod’s voices are heard and fragments of poetry reach the speaker’s ears. These eerie lines of poetry give way to a complete assault of the senses on the speaker as the ghosts of the Skye oppressors rise up and are seen on the peaks of the mountain, dancing and celebrating their actions. MacLean begins to list his heroes such as Lenin, Marx, John MacLean and Donald MacCallum but the suffering and hardship is too great and the cry of oppression is so strong that it pierces him and takes his strength. Part I ends with the poet lamenting the macabre scene and remarking that he is on ‘creagan spòrsa’¹⁵² while Scotland languishes in sickness.

Perhaps as an antidote to the despairing ending of Part I, Part II begins with the poet reaffirming that the Cuillin is with him in spite of life’s horrors. His initiation with the Cuillin continues and the mountain takes on the characteristics of a primal mother figure. Pàdraig Mór’s music comes to him and the landscape is drenched in the lyric and music of a praise poem as familiar places such as Minginish, Waternish, Trotternish, and Raasay are named and described. Tension is created between this beauty and the pain of struggle as symbolised by the Spanish Civil War, which clearly haunts the speaker. MacLean envisions the great peaks of the Cuillin as memorial cairns to the bravery of the Asturians. His attention then turns to Scotland and the rest of Europe which he sees as falling under the power of evil. He laments the lack of heroes on Skye now the men of Braes have gone. Portents of heartbreak and death are seen in the form of the Will-of-the-Wisp. Part II ends with MacLean introducing the morass of Mararabhlainn which has inherited the ghosts of the people.

In Part III the morass sheds its distinctively local perspective and takes on a greater symbolic significance as a world-wide bog which swallows everything in its path. It is relentless with no respect of person – the bourgeois are swallowed but so too are the heroes and the beautiful things within the world. In this section of the poem the Skye Stallion is mentioned for the first time. MacLean writes that the Stallion was gelded by its oppressors

¹⁵² MacLean, 1999, p. 74.

and news has not reached Scotland that the Stallion has no power. However, Russia, France, India and China are aware of this fact. This is clearly a thinly veiled reference to the fact that revolution has taken place in these countries and MacLean is calling for the same thing to happen in his own land. MacLean wishes that he had been in the Stallion's saddle in order to catch up with the brilliance of the poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid and Alexander MacDonald. However, he states that he did not see greatness in the same way that they did and instead he must stand by the side of Màiri Mhór in order to catalogue the wrongs committed on his island. He wants to avoid 'clàr treun a h-aodann'.¹⁵³ Màiri Mhór takes on goddess-like proportions and, realising that little has changed since her own time as a poet, MacLean does not want to disappoint this strong figure of his imagination and his cultural heritage. At this point MacLean has cast himself in a different role from that of MacDiarmid. From his place on the mountain he is fixed and unable to see hope of change in the world and yet even in the depths of his despair the mountain is a strength to him as he describes it as the place where contradictions and polar opposites may gather and exist together – he uses Christ and Lenin to explain this point.

Part IV further highlights the poet's despair at the state of the world and he turns this despair on himself. He has a foot in the morass and a foot on the Cuillin but the morass is encroaching in on his spirit, heart and talents. As the morass pulls at him his ascent up the mountain becomes more difficult and a personal struggle ensues with MacLean claiming he may not reach the summit of the Bidean, Blà Bheinn or Sgurr nan Gillean.

As a positive answer to the depths of the poet's misery, Part V is the point in which hope begins to take hold with the arrival of the Skye Stallion – the symbol of the rising power of Socialism. Part V could be viewed as a praise poem to the Stallion and is the turning point and 'lyrical peak' of the poem with the energetic, surging spirit of the Stallion stamping the oppressors of the masses into the bog. MacLean invests this animal with the spirit of his heroes from Gaelic history. However, the Stallion is also a natural symbol of the landscape with the ruggedness of the cliffs and the energetic movement of the oceans forming its character. The Skye Stallion's arrival and presence is linked to the music of Pàdraig Mór and Pàdraig Òg and thus he is further associated with the cultural landscape as well as the purely physical one. As the Stallion leaps from sgurr to sgurr the Cuillin also becomes charged with

¹⁵³ MacLean, 1999, p. 90.

energy. However, MacLean's symbol does not bring with it an instant remedy to oppression – the striving related to the difficult ascent of the Cuillin must still be undertaken and acts of heroism must still be fulfilled but the poet has renewed purpose and vigour. To underline this point Part V ends with a Gaelic version of MacDiarmid's poem, 'If there are bounds to any man'.

In Part VI new voices begin to encroach into the poem and MacLean's voice gives way to a female perspective. The girl from Gesto describes her hardships and her longing for Skye after she has been forcibly taken into slavery to work in America. Her longing takes the form of a praise poem and the fate of the 'Annie Jane' is also described. The voice of Clio, muse of history, takes over and she recounts the fate of mankind through the ages, beginning with Skye and the Highlands and moving further a-field to encompass Europe and the rest of the world. Clio's story seems to play out in front of MacLean. Near the end of Part VI there is a description of a very old Gaelic motif, the wheel of fortune, turning and the mountains shouting for joy. MacLean explains that the Cuillin is rocking with the spiritual energy of the hero.

By the time Part VII begins MacLean's vision has turned from the past to the more timeless and limitless space of the eternal in which all heroes become as one in the quest for justice and the end of suffering through self-sacrifice. Christ, Dimitrov, Spartacus, and Prometheus are mentioned in this context and the visions that the speaker describes become more intense and apocalyptic in their scope – he has a frightening hallucination of the woman he loves turning into a vulture and attacking him and he witnesses a sea-monster coming out of the water and curling around the Cuillin before striking up towards heaven. Unlike Part I when it was the oppressors that were mainly seen on the mountain it is now MacLean's heroes such as Marx, Lenin, Liebknecht, Connolly and John Maclean who are glimpsed walking on the slopes. In a surrealist way the mountain becomes the site of every occasion which the poet sees as significant – it is almost literally the 'world mountain' with the rebels of the Easter Rising and the Glasgow funeral procession of John Maclean winding up the 'streets' of the mountain while the chains of Tatu Ho swing between the mountain peaks. Three Cuillin mountains rise up, symbolising Skye, Scotland and mankind. This vision encompasses the whole of mankind but the last section of Part VII focuses on the poet's personal identity – he glimpses a spirit, the naked ghost of the heart and brain who journeys a little in front of him and whom he cannot catch up with or fully comprehend. There is a clear revelation of hope

for mankind but this vision of ‘am falbhan’ at the end of the poem is more subtly penetrating and operates on a personal level. Thus in ‘An Cuilithionn’ the collective message also contains within it a message for the individual and after the many voices and the apocalyptic images have faded the poet possesses an understanding of his own identity.

My outline of the seven parts of ‘An Cuilithionn’ uses the published version of the poem from MacLean’s *O Choille gu Bearradh/ From Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems*. The version of ‘An Cuilithionn’ which is published in *O Choille gu Bearradh* is considerably shorter than the manuscripts of the poem which are in existence. Christopher Whyte deals more fully with the archive materials relating to ‘An Cuilithionn’ in his article ‘Sorley MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’: the emergence of the text’¹⁵⁴ but due to the emphasis I place on the narrative structure and the importance of various images and symbols throughout the poem, it is necessary to address certain issues relating to the manuscripts in the thesis.

Whyte has named the three different redactions of the poem **A**, **B** and **C**. **A** is the manuscript copy of ‘An Cuilithionn’ in Aberdeen University Library, which includes 16 lines not available in any other versions. **B** is the manuscripts which were written between 1940 and 1944, and **C** is the poem as it was published in installments in *Chapman* between 1987 and 1989, and later in *O Choille gu Bearradh* in 1989.¹⁵⁵ Whyte writes that ‘MacLean, then, chose at the end of the 1930s to publish roughly three-quarters of what he had originally written in 1939.’¹⁵⁶ I have reproduced Whyte’s excellent table which charts the number of lines in each part of the poem and shows how the poem was considerably reduced as time went on.

Figure 1: Christopher Whyte’s table of the number of excised lines from the manuscripts of ‘An Cuilithionn’

	B	C	Discrepancy
Part I	298	210	-88
Part II	214	167	-47
Part III	218	158	-60

¹⁵⁴ Christopher Whyte, ‘Sorley MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’: The emergence of the text’ in *Cànan & Cultar/ Language and Culture: Ramsachadh na Gàidhlig* 3 ed. W. McLeod, J. Fraser and A. Gunderloch (Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press, 2006) pp. 111-127.

¹⁵⁵ Whyte, 2006, p. 111.

¹⁵⁶ Whyte, 2006, p. 119.

Part IV	64	60	-4
Part V	202	164	-38
Part VI	269	261	-8
Part VII	349	191	-158

From the research which I have conducted on the manuscripts of ‘An Cuilithionn’, it is clear that MacLean’s overall opinion of Socialism changed little and is still quite strong throughout the published poem. However, it is the specifics which have been toned down or phased out. In the manuscript version there is a stronger sense of MacLean’s disillusionment with the clergy and the popular press. Also, Stalin later became a source of embarrassment for MacLean and his earlier admiration did not linger once the atrocities committed by Stalin had come to light. In **B**, Part III includes the lines:

Cò idir a chartas a’ bhàthaich
mur tig an t-Arm Dearg ’nar càs-ne?
Cò chuireas dhuinn a-mach am buadhchar
mur teirinn Stàlain bho na cruachan?¹⁵⁷

Whereas by the time C is published mentions of Stalin have been excised:

Cò bheir faochadh dhan àmhghar
mur tig an t-Arm Dearg sa chàs seo?¹⁵⁸

It is perfectly feasible that MacLean kept the mention of the Red Army because it acted as more of a symbol than an individual such as Stalin did. The Red Army was still acceptable to MacLean’s political vision and he writes in a letter to Douglas Young as early as 22nd February 1941 about his hopes that British and German capitalism will fall and that ‘perhaps then red armies will rise without need for Stalin to come.’¹⁵⁹

In **B**, Part VI, some of the Clio stanzas vary slightly from the published version (**C**). For example, in **C**, MacLean writes:

’S mise Clio mhór Shasainn:
cha b’ e mo chuibhrionn-sa a b’ fhasa:
chunnaic mi Tyler is John Ball,
Kett is Dudley olc is More,
Lilburne, ’s air Drochaid Ath-bhuirg
MacThómais le daga ’s gach dòrn;
Blake is Shelley le ’n cràdhlot,

¹⁵⁷ MS 29558, NLS, f. 12.

¹⁵⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 84.

¹⁵⁹ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

ioma Pàirc is Dachaidh Stàiteil.¹⁶⁰

In comparison to the manuscript (**B**):

'S mise Clio mhór Shasuinn;
cha b' e mo chuibhrionn-sa a b' fhasa;
chunnaic mi Tyler is John Ball
is Robert Kett agus an còrr;
chuala mi Shelley 'na ghlòir
agus Byron anns na Lords;
chunnaic mi fearas-mhór is leinn
agus Paul Robesan a' seinn.¹⁶¹

This example shows that MacLean had many other cultural references with which he was conversant but which did not make it to final publication.

It is likely that many of the excised lines were removed because of their personal nature. In the passion of composing 'An Cuilithionn' these examples may have been acceptable to MacLean but later, during the editing process of the poem, he perhaps felt it was better to remove them. In one example, later excised from Part I, he criticises Marjory Kennedy Fraser:

Ach chunnaic mi Nic Uarraig-Friseal
a' truailleadh ciùil le flùr a' phris ud;
's chi mi cailleach bheag chabach,
cop m' a beul 's an tuar glas air.
A chionn gum facas iadsan uile,
an Diabhul mi! Chan iarr mi tuilleadh.¹⁶²

Also in Part I of **B** Robin Lorimer cautions MacLean against publishing the lines below. He warns him that 'you will find yourself involved in heavy controversy':

Feannag phlamach air aon dùn
'na suidhe air sparran sleamhna tùir,
feannag bhreugach am Port-rìgh
a' sodal-guib ris an té shlim.¹⁶³

Later in **B**, Part I, there are lines which refer to a Skyeman as a hoodie crow. They are a scathing personal attack and were probably removed for this reason.

Ach, ma dh'fheòraichean gun fhiatachd
cà ruige sgreamh an Eilean fhiachail,
their mi creutair ge e' Sgitheanach
'Se sliomaireachd ri fuigheall thriathan:
feannag fhaoin dhubh shliamach,

¹⁶⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 112.

¹⁶¹ MS 29558, NLS, f. 68.

¹⁶² MS 29558, NLS, f. 8.

¹⁶³ MS 29558, NLS, f. 4.

creutair suarach 's e ri iadach,
gealtach cuilbheartach sniagach,
sleamhuinn labhar lag liagach,
curach carach baoth bialach,
sliom sodalach mìlis briagach.¹⁶⁴

It is easy to comprehend the removal of lines such as these, especially if MacLean was striving for a universal tone, rather than a parochial one. However it is more difficult to understand the removal of the more lyrical passages. In one instance, there is an aesthetic reason for the changes made. Stylistic improvements from a passage in Part I can be viewed. In B MacLean writes:

Dhìùchd dhomh glòir an t-sàir Eilein,
dhiùchd, ach thàinig smuain eile
dè don Sgitheanach fàth mo ruin
an uair a dhireas e gu bùirdeas?¹⁶⁵

By the time C is published this passage has been altered significantly:

Dhìùchd dhomh bòidhche an t-sàr Eilein,
dhiùchd ach thàinig sian a' pheileir:
ciamar a chunnas an gaol seo
greim air creig dheighe 'n t-saoghail?¹⁶⁶

By far the most noticeable of the excised lyrical passages is the 'Cuillin Praise poem', excised from Part VII, which I discuss in more detail in Appendix II of this thesis. These lines are of a very high quality and are amongst the most traditionally 'Gaelic' in style of all the sections of 'An Cuilithionn', which may have been a factor in the decision to remove them since translation of this sort of poetry can prove problematic and MacLean's poems were intended to have English translations.¹⁶⁷ Christopher Whyte has suggested that the removal of these 112 lines has 'a significant effect on the overall 'choreography' of the poem's different movements' and that 'its absence makes the work end on a grimmer and weightier note than would otherwise have been the case'.¹⁶⁸ I would like to offer a different interpretation regarding this theory. I propose that the poem finishes on a personal as opposed to a grim note and if these quatrains had been included they might have affected this sense of identity and consciousness which I believe MacLean was trying to establish. The omission of these 112 lines may be attributable to MacLean's wish to make the end of Part VII a reflection on the place of personal identity in the poem that led to the omission of these

¹⁶⁴ MS 29558, NLS, f. 8.

¹⁶⁵ MS 29558, NLS, f. 5.

¹⁶⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 68.

¹⁶⁷ Whyte, 2006, p. 126).

¹⁶⁸ Whyte, 2006, pp. 123-124.

quatrains.

The brief outline of ‘An Cuilithionn’ and the discussion of the manuscripts, which I have provided above, is intended as a starting point for a fuller investigation into the poetic vision of MacLean. As this thesis progresses some of the main points which I have introduced in this outline will be explored in more detail in relation to the theme of journeying and heroic sacrifice.

2.2 Sorley MacLean’s Critical Essays and Writings

Sorley MacLean’s poetry has understandably attracted the attention of many scholars over the years but it is perhaps surprising that there have been considerably fewer articles and books published on the subject of his work than other poets such as Hugh MacDiarmid. The reason for this may be that his decision to write in Gaelic has affected his readership to a certain extent, with non-Gaelic speaking critics having to rely on translations of his poems. It is only in recent years that he has begun to fully receive the amount of attention that is due to a poet of such stature. Since the early 1980s there has been a more general realisation that MacLean’s poetry is of interest and importance on a European as well as a Scottish scale and this awareness means that work on MacLean should be set to continue. Some time has now passed since the poet’s death in 1996 and it is perhaps now possible to view his poetry from more of a distance and to place his work into the context of the literary climate of the twentieth century as a whole.

One of the most important sources of information for Sorley MacLean’s thinking are his own critical essays which were edited by William Gillies in *Ris a’ Bhruthaich: The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley MacLean* in 1985. Gillies wrote that these essays on Gaelic literature ‘not only represent a substantial and pioneer achievement in their own right, but also contribute significant insights into the mind of the poet’.¹⁶⁹ One essay in particular is enlightening in the information that it provides about the influences on MacLean’s poetry – in ‘My Relationship with the Muse’ MacLean highlights his Gaelic background with specific reference to his family’s rich heritage of music and song. It is obvious that this had a profound effect on the way he viewed poetry and the results of this love of Gaelic song can

¹⁶⁹ William Gillies, ‘The Poet as Critic’ in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 185-200 (p. 185).

be seen in his own work and also in the way he viewed non-Gaelic literature:

What I am trying to say is that very early in life I came to be obsessed with the lyric, first of all because of my unusually rich Gaelic background; with the lyric in the Greek sense of a marriage of poetry and music, and then, because I was not a musician, with the lyric in the Shelleyan and Blakeian sense of a short or shortish poem suggesting song even if it could never be sung...¹⁷⁰

MacLean's emphasis on the lyric continues throughout the essays in *Ris a' Bhruthaich* – in one essay, 'Old Songs and New Poetry', he examines the lyric in depth and concludes that the modern Gaelic poet cannot avoid the old songs:

The old songs are 'there', and in a more human way than the mountains were 'there' in Mallory's words. If they are greater than poetry alone, nevertheless the poet cannot avoid them. It may be that there is the same kind of compulsion in the minds of the many who have maintained that if a poem cannot in some way approach the quality of music, if it lacks the lyrical cry, then it is not poetry.¹⁷¹

In this sense MacLean's critical essays clearly come from a Gaelic perspective. In an interview with Donald Archie MacDonald in 1982 he introduces himself as 'Somhairle mac Chaluim 'ic Caluim 'ic Iain 'ic Tharmaid 'ic Iain 'ic Tharmaid',¹⁷² showing that his sense of history and his sense of place is acute. Every opinion that MacLean puts forth in his essays is somehow linked back to his tradition and he is well aware of this, exclaiming at one point that 'Sometimes I feel that people like myself ought to shut up about the old songs.'¹⁷³

However, the mere fact that he shows such an interest and passion towards them is of value to any study of his poetry since such an obvious influence must be detected in some form in his

¹⁷⁰ MacLean, 1985, p. 9. There has always been a link between music and poetry and this is not something that was confined to the Gaelic tradition. MacLean would have been aware that the composer F.G. Scott set many of MacDiarmid's lyrics to music. See Bold, 1988, pp. 149-151. In a letter to MacLean, George Davie discusses Scott's interest in setting poetry to music and he writes that Scott 'would like to get a good communist poem to set, primarily of course because he wishes to try his hand at a new kind of artistic problem.' MS 29501, NLS, f. 12. It seems that Davie perhaps had MacLean's political poetry in mind for Scott as he certainly appears to have discussed MacLean in depth with Scott and according to the same letter Scott voiced strong opinions about Gaelic metre, pibroch etc. This relationship between composers and poets/writers is a relationship that has as much resonance now as it did in the 1930s. *Ballads of the Book* is a recent project that has encouraged Scottish writers to work with musicians and to produce an album of their work – the project has included Rody Gorman, Alasdair Gray and John Burnside. Burnside has written that 'behind it all, every poet, no matter how modest his or her aspirations, is haunted by Mallarmé's famous dictum: "Poetry aspires to the condition of music".' See John Burnside, 'The Write Beat', *The Scotsman, Critique*, 24 February 2007, pp. 4-5.

¹⁷¹ MacLean, 1985, pp. 117-118.

¹⁷² MacDonald, 1986, p. 211. This statement echoes his words in 'Dol an Iar' – 'tha mi de dh'fhir mhór' a' Bhràighe, /de Chloinn Mhic Ghille Chaluim threubhaich, / de Mhathanaich Loch Aills nan geurlann,' MacLean, 1999, p. 206.

¹⁷³ MacLean, 1985, p. 115.

work.

Despite a primarily Gaelic focus in his essays he does not allow himself to be confined by the tradition and he discusses Gaelic literature and culture in modern literary terms, using examples from the world of Western literature and philosophy to underline his points – he mentions Freud when discussing modernism and the elimination of romance from poetry¹⁷⁴ and names writers and scholars such as Valéry, Blok, Rilke, Lawrence, Croce and Eliot in the same essay.¹⁷⁵ This readiness to place Gaelic poetry within a wider context cannot fail to have had a profound effect on MacLean's Gaelic readership, showing them, in Gillies' words, that Gaelic poetry is 'accessible to serious modern criticism.'¹⁷⁶ MacLean has rescued it 'from irrelevance, mysticism, and evasiveness, by showing what were the right tools for the job and demonstrating how they could be applied to it.'¹⁷⁷ MacLean's essays show that he is as comfortable outside the Gaelic context as he is within it and this observation is of great importance to my thesis since I will be looking at 'An Cuilithionn' through a variety of lenses which will not all be of a specifically Gaelic nature.

MacLean's critical essays give an insight into his opinions on Gaelic poetry and individual poets but they do not cover his political outlook in any detail. The only mentions of his socialism in 'My Relationship with the Muse' are in relation to mythic and literary figures such as Prometheus or in terms of personal statements such as the age when he fully embraced Socialism¹⁷⁸, and thus the reader is left without any proper knowledge of MacLean's specific ideas on Socialism, Communism and Fascism or his opinions on political parties in Scotland such as the SNP and the Communist Party. His unpublished letters to the likes of Douglas Young are more helpful in this area but MacLean's published body of criticism lacks the political considerations that Hugh MacDiarmid has furnished scholars with. MacDiarmid's outpourings¹⁷⁹ were considerable but MacLean did not venture into the

¹⁷⁴ MacLean, 1985, p. 116.

¹⁷⁵ MacLean, 1985, p. 111.

¹⁷⁶ Gillies, 1986, p. 198.

¹⁷⁷ Gillies, 1986, p. 198.

¹⁷⁸ MacLean, 1985, p. 10.

¹⁷⁹ See Glen, 1964, pp. 247-262 for a detailed bibliography of MacDiarmid's prose writings, contributions to periodicals, newspapers and magazines and his published pamphlets and small editions.

world of political criticism and journalism like MacDiarmid did and thus MacLean's political stance must be gleaned from private letters and his own poetry. A more politically perceptive side to MacLean becomes apparent when his letters are studied and the attitude displayed by MacLean in correspondence greatly aids the study of his poetry, especially in relation to politically charged poems such as 'An Cuilithionn'. Only when his letters are made more widely available to the public in published form will a fuller picture emerge of the poet and the motives behind his poetry as well as his grasp of the political situation of the period. Lack of information in this area may be one reason why little has been written on MacLean's politics – any information in articles mainly concentrates on his political commitment in relation to love or his political ideals in the manner of Shelley since these are the details that are immediately accessible from the primary published evidence that MacLean has left behind.

2.3 MacLean and Young's Correspondence During World War II

While MacLean's published essays are invaluable as a source of information regarding his attitudes to literature and Gaelic culture, his unpublished letters are also of value, especially in relation to his thoughts around the time in which 'An Cuilithionn' was composed, as they give a sense of how these ideas were challenged due to the onset of war. During the time that MacLean was in training and then on active service with the British Army there was a steady stream of letters between himself and Douglas Young, who had chosen for political reasons to take a pacifist stance during the war. In some instances the letters were delayed or lost for a while due to the difficulties experienced with wartime postal services but in general the letters between the two men maintain a consistent account of the many topics covered including politics, the state of the Gaelic language, the progress of the war, Scottish literature and MacLean's own poetry. Douglas Young had been entrusted with many of MacLean's poems and was in the act of preparing manuscripts for publication. 'An Cuilithionn' had been completed towards the end of 1939¹⁸⁰ and these letters date up to four years after this time but it is possible that they still have relevance to the content of 'An Cuilithionn'. In many instances MacLean's opinions changed little from those expressed in poetic form in 'An Cuilithionn' but there are also cases in which the experiences of war have coloured his ideas and this is an interesting development to note. It is important to keep the context of the letters in mind at all times – events connected to the war were happening very quickly and detailed

¹⁸⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 63.

information was not always immediately available. At this present time we have the luxury of hindsight but it should be remembered that many of MacLean and Young's opinions were formed from the information that was available to them at the time of their letter writing and as World War II played itself out more detailed information or new occurrences could affect their opinions and theories.

One of the most important features, especially in the earlier letters, was MacLean's justification for taking part in the Second World War. In a letter from Catterick Camp, Yorks on 1st October 1940 MacLean argues out his case to Young:

As for my conscience, well! Am I being a traitor to Scotland and more so to the class struggle? Am I just in the army because I haven't the courage to object? All I can say is that I have such an instinctive loathing and fear of Nazism and such a distrust of its demagogy that I cannot accept for myself the ?¹⁸¹ of refusing to resist it even with the co-operation of English imperialist capitalism. My reading of it may be wrong as you say.¹⁸²

MacLean's hatred of fascism can be viewed here. He feels it must be obliterated at all costs even if he is forced to surrender some of his Socialist principles in the process. To a certain extent, a development in MacLean's belief system can be viewed – during his university days MacLean was pre-occupied with an idealistic form of socialism and by this point his ideas had moved towards a dilemma that would have an effect on much of the poetry that he was writing around this time. The dilemma was centred on the question of whether it was better to be a man of action or inaction and this depended on MacLean's choice of whether to put Communist principles above his need to rid the world of fascism. Both these options had at their heart a sense of idealism that was typical of the late 1930s and early 1940s. Young men such as MacLean who had come through the university system and had been given the opportunity to widen their knowledge of philosophy and politics had formulated ideas and were now finding their standpoints put to the test. In an earlier letter dated 24th September 1940 Douglas Young wrote to MacLean from Ardlogie, Leuchars that:

I am filled with fury and disgust that you should tamely surrender your coolin-ascending philabeg-swinging legs to be encased in H.M. shit-coloured breeks and thus trot up and down the muddy plains of Yorkshire at the bawling of a Sassenach sergeant. The only good thing I can see about it is that, when and if you come back, you will be a fervent patriot.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Word unclear here.

¹⁸² Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

Beyond the jocular teasing of this letter some fundamental points can be identified. Young obviously views MacLean's heritage as being of major importance and he sees nationalism as an ultimate goal. On the other hand, while MacLean's sense of his Gaelic identity is always strong in his poetry his decision to join the army as a way of stopping fascism in its tracks is far more in keeping with the sort of poetry he was writing up to 1939.

The fight against fascism was an important theme in *Dàin do Eimhir* and he had already expressed a wish to fight in the Spanish Civil War, which was the major stand against fascism before the Second World War broke out.¹⁸⁴ Fascism is also viewed as a great evil in 'An Cuilithionn'. Although it was composed before the full extent of Nazism came into being the suppression of Socialists and Communists by the Nazis was not lost on MacLean:

'S mise Clio na Gearmailte:
a Dhia, 's mise chunnaic alla-cheò
air cor is cridhe nan daoine,
Liebknecht, Thaelmann is daorsa.¹⁸⁵

It seems that over time MacLean's view that action was the best solution still held true for him. It was the path that he chose for the Second World War and later when he came to write 'My Relationship with the Muse' he still believed this if the following is interpreted in this light:

Iain Lom's famous words to Alastair MacDonald "You do the fighting and I'll do the praising" I consider disgusting, however expedient they might have been to the exigencies of the situation, and however wise they might have been in the long run. I could not have been an Iain Lom at Inverlochy or an Auden in America in 1939.¹⁸⁶

It is clear that at the outbreak of World War II the intelligentsia in Scotland were greatly divided as to the position they should take in the war. Often their sense of Scottish Nationalism and Socialism were at odds with joining the British Army and many chose a pacifist stance for this reason. On 8th November 1940 Young wrote to MacLean from Aberdeen that Robert MacIntyre had become organizing secretary of the S.N.P.¹⁸⁷ He had

¹⁸³ MS 29540, NLS, f.43.

¹⁸⁴ For more detailed discussion of *Dàin do Eimhir* and MacLean's political commitment see Whyte, 2002.

¹⁸⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 114.

¹⁸⁶ MacLean, 1985, p. 12.

¹⁸⁷ Robert Douglas MacIntyre (1913-1998) was the SNP membership secretary from 1940. He gravitated towards the more radical wing of the SNP and was a conscientious objector during WWII.

clearly spoken with MacIntyre about MacLean's stance in the war because he goes on to write:

Robert thinks poorly of your political calculus, about weakening Hitler so he will be less able to attack Jo [Stalin]. Far too round about and indirect. The sector for advance is, in my view, the Scottish; and, if not, then the British. However, let that flea stick to the wa'.¹⁸⁸

With the same letter Young sent MacLean the preface and some selections from William Soutar's *In the Time of Tyrants*. This was a discussion of the necessity for pacifism and shows the extent of the philosophical debate that was raging at the time.¹⁸⁹ MacLean himself reveals in his letters that he was not always entirely comfortable in his decisions:

Even if I were intellectually convinced I don't know if I would have the courage to take your line or Hay's but my attitude to the Nazis is crudely like what I imagine Muir's is – that they are just the very devil. You have [MacDiarmid] on your side but I cannot lean much on his political judgement. What worries me far more is that I fear you have too the example of John MacLean; but is the case the same? I believe he would have taken your line in effect and that fills me with misgiving about myself. You see I am not a pure conscript.¹⁹⁰

The Marxist Clydesider John MacLean, had campaigned against military and industrial conscription during the First World War and due to his pacifist stance was imprisoned in 1916 and 1918.¹⁹¹ When MacLean wrote to Young about John MacLean and asked 'but is the case the same?' it could be surmised that he viewed the circumstances of the First World War and the Second World War as different and that John MacLean had not had the motive that he himself had had. It was the threat of Nazism above all else that was the reason for his own decision to participate in the war.

In a letter dated almost a month after the one which mentions John MacLean, Sorley MacLean is still strong in his belief that he is doing the right thing:

I am full of sorrow that I should not be with you and Hay rather than with the people I am with but I cannot. I loathe and despise all you mean by British but I loathe and fear the Nazis and fear is the more dynamic emotion than contempt.¹⁹²

However, this letter goes much further than simply reiterating his anti-Nazi feeling. It also deals with theories about what may happen in the future concerning the major world powers

¹⁸⁸ MS 29540, NLS, f. 44.

¹⁸⁹ MS 29540, NLS, f. 57.

¹⁹⁰ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

¹⁹¹ See Nan Milton, *John Maclean* (London: Pluto Press, 1973) for a detailed biography of Maclean.

¹⁹² Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

including the Soviet Union. Considering 'An Cuilithionn' contains themes such as the hope that Communism could be an important way forward for mankind, there is a logical progression from 'An Cuilithionn' to the opinions held by MacLean a year later when Europe was entering into even more turmoil. It is clear from the letter that besides his anti-Nazi feeling MacLean's main concern is that the Soviet Union and by extension, Communism, should be able to emerge as a significant power:

The most desirable result would be that Britain and Germany should smack one another and enable Russia to impose Communism on Europe. I have not lost my belief that Jo and Dimitrov have done all that is possible for Socialism but I never thought that they were omnipotent...I do not see why I should excise Dimitrov from the Cuillin or Jo either until history has proved them wrong...The British Empire is relatively a ramshackle business and would dissolve of itself. The only positive progressive forces that I can see are Russia and China...¹⁹³

Thus, it is clear that at this point MacLean still more or less agrees with the stance taken in 'An Cuilithionn'. Although he admits in the letter that he may have overestimated the Red Army his hope and faith in Communism remains quite strong throughout his service in the army. On 3rd August 1941 he writes to Young that:

At any rate the effect on the British army of the Russian resistance is enormous – at the present rate of progress the British army will soon be a second Red army. For myself, if Russia goes down, my single aim will be vengeance at any price. If Russia wins, the day of reckoning will be near in Scotland as well as in Spain, Italy etc...¹⁹⁴

As time goes on and more information comes through about the Soviet resistance MacLean's hopes for Communism begin to take centre stage in his letters to Young. On 9th November 1941 he writes:

To me, now as before, everything depends on the Red Army. I want their victory...and if the Red army holds out I think there will be many Red armies, perhaps even the stupid south Englishmen will learn something but perhaps not.¹⁹⁵

His attitude is positive towards the Red Army and he has lost none of the hopes that he expressed in 'An Cuilithionn'. Writing to Young from the Middle East on 15th March 1942 he states:

I expect this year will decide the course of the war and often have wild hopes that the near future may see certain lines of the Cuillin fulfilled. Thus I have more concern than usual about my own chances of survival.

¹⁹³ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

¹⁹⁴ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

¹⁹⁵ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

I should like to live to see that...¹⁹⁶

One can only guess as to which of the lines of his poem he hopes to see become a reality but it is certainly likely that they concern Russia and the Red Army. In Part I of ‘An Cuilithionn’ he writes:

’S gus an tig an t-Arm Dearg còmhla
le caismeachd tarsainn na Roinn-Eòrpa,
drùidhidh iorram na truaighe
air mo chridhe ’s air mo bhuadhan.¹⁹⁷

The manuscript version of this part of the poem has a comment from Robin Lorimer in the margin. He questions the lines above, advising that MacLean either remove them or explain his reasons for the inclusion of the lines in an introductory note.¹⁹⁸ However, it seems according to MacLean’s letters that even by early 1942 he had not lost complete faith in the need for a Russian victory. As late as 27th May 1943, when he was in Raigmore Hospital Inverness, recovering from war wounds, MacLean showed an interest in at least the ideals held by Communism. Writing to Young he states:

At present I am not myself very interested in any politics except the preservation of Gaelic so that something can be saved for the better days to come, if they come...But I really think Gaelic has only one chance of survival, namely the fairly quick setting up of a Scottish Soviet Republic which would eliminate the cash and profit and careerist motive more radically than Russia appears to have done. With power in the right hands, and at not too long a time, anything could be done...¹⁹⁹

In his introduction to ‘An Cuilithionn’ in *O Choille gu Bearradh* MacLean writes that ‘the behaviour of the Russian Government to the Polish insurrection in 1944 made me politically as well as aesthetically disgusted with most of it.’²⁰⁰ Thus, it was only a year after the letter above was written that MacLean became properly disillusioned with the Soviet Union and perhaps no longer viewed it as the major hope for humanity. His enthusiasm and hopes had been blunted but despite all of this he decided to keep the references to the Red Army in what he later published of ‘An Cuilithionn’. One of the reasons for this could be that for MacLean in both his poetry and his political views the Red Army had become a symbol far more powerful than its actual reality. The ‘Red Army’ could stand for any force that would lead humanity out of the evil morass that it had fallen into and this was not an idea that MacLean would have wanted to give up on despite the circumstances of the war and the way events in

¹⁹⁶ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

¹⁹⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 74.

¹⁹⁸ ‘Do you believe this now? If not, should you excise these lines? The test is do you want to say this now...you will certainly have to write a preface redefining your views on all these questions.’ MS 29559, NLS, f. 8.

¹⁹⁹ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

²⁰⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 63.

the Soviet Union turned out.

The letters, which MacLean sent to Douglas Young, reinforce these suggestions about MacLean's political outlook. The impression given in the letters is that MacLean places most emphasis on the social improvements brought about by Communism in the Soviet Union. He views the Soviet regime as a positive force because of what it achieved:

...the Bolshevik achievement in the past twenty years must be unparalleled morally, just as it is perhaps unparalleled physically. It is I think the [sic] by far the greatest thing hitherto recorded in history that the courage, self-sacrifice and achievement of a non-theistic, non pie-in-the-sky, humanist optimism should completely overshadow the courage and self-sacrifice engendered by the German inferiority complex neurosis and all other myths.²⁰¹

The letter above was sent by MacLean to Young from the Middle East on 6th October 1942. On 21st June 1941, MacLean had sent Young a letter from Catterick Camp in which he discussed the social progress rumoured to be happening within the Soviet Union:

If it is true that in Russia there is no longer female prostitution and that the display of possessions is considered most 'vulgar' of all things, then I consider that what happens to the rest of Europe matters little if that survives in Russia. Be Stalin anything at all, fool or blackguard, if he is a leader of a regime that has achieved such, then the continuance of his regime is priceless to humanity.²⁰²

From these letters it can be inferred that in MacLean's view the progress with the war is of secondary importance to the progress of mankind from a Socialist perspective. MacLean is concerned mainly with the issues and problems connected to the masses and he believes that an overturning of the 'status quo' or the old order is needed before society can significantly improve. This is in line with his thinking in his earlier life when he was fascinated with Promethean figures, fighting against the odds to improve mankind's lot. On 27th Oct 1940 he writes to Young that:

I see politics primarily as the class war and I consider that a German victory would be the worst thing for the working classes of Europe and the intellectuals as well.²⁰³

This attitude is continued in a letter dated 22nd February 1941:

The army has more than ever convinced me of the essential likenesses

²⁰¹ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

²⁰² Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

²⁰³ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

of all nations and has more than ever convinced me that the only real and only worthwhile war is the class war...My own position is that I am very willing to contribute as much as possible to the self destruction of German and British capitalisms even if it entails laying waste both countries. Perhaps then red armies will rise without need for Stalin's to come.²⁰⁴

These lines are significant because they encapsulate some of the major themes present in 'An Cuilithionn'. 'An Cuilithionn' is a revolutionary poem for the reason that it calls for the abolition of the corrupt upper classes and capitalism, with symbols such as the Stallion standing for the rising of a new power. Throughout the poem there are many references to Lenin, Communism and the Red Army but the last line of the letter above is interesting because MacLean appears to be suggesting that the 'Red Army' does not have to be essentially Russian – he is not content to wait until a force comes marching over Europe from the East to save Scotland. Red armies can rise up in any country and the Soviet Union is just one example of what can happen across the world. Again, this attitude highlights MacLean's sense of idealism and need for action. When this attitude of MacLean's is considered it is possible to suggest that his avid interest in the Soviet progress in the war was due to the feeling that Europe needed a template or example of a Communist success. If the content of the letters are viewed in this way it is clear that MacLean's political ideals have changed little from the period in which 'An Cuilithionn' was composed and his vision has remained universal in scope. The poem may have eventually fallen out of favour with MacLean due to his disillusionment with Stalin's totalitarian regime but it should be remembered that as a poet he was standing too close to historical world events to view the themes in his poetry as removed and separate from specific individuals, whereas the passing of time allows the modern reader to assess the merits of the poem in a more favourable light. The themes in 'An Cuilithionn' are too far-reaching in scope to be confined to one period of history alone.

One of the major effects of MacLean's participation in the war is that he was able to come close and experience first hand the human suffering that he had addressed as an important issue in 'An Cuilithionn'. In this way, the MacLean-Young letters can act as a reinforcement or 'afterword' to the poem. As MacLean begins to engage in active service in the Middle East human suffering and sacrifice becomes a harsh reality and he lives out some of what he had already described in his earlier poetry. In one letter dated 27th October 1942 he mentions an

²⁰⁴ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

incident that was almost certainly a motivation for his poem, 'Glac a' Bhàis'.²⁰⁵

When one sees another get wounded or killed one realises the hellishness of it. The first dead man I saw in action was a young German sitting in a pathetic attitude in a dug-out entrance. He made me ashamed of many [sic] of many foolish generalisations I had made about the necessity for wiping out all Fascists. Probably he wasn't a fascist after all or, if he was, only of the kind the ordinary politically unconscious man must be in every fascist country...²⁰⁶

In the same letter MacLean discusses a friend's death near the divisional H.Q. He had looked forward to introducing this friend to MacDiarmid since 'he was the man who saw things in [MacDiarmid's] lyrics that I have never heard anyone else point out, and that struck me as very subtle.'²⁰⁷ In the letters to Young during this time MacLean never loses sight of a sense of the suffering of the individual although at times under the circumstances of war he evidently finds it difficult to rationalise these thoughts:

When one thinks of the millions of people who have no political interests and who wish only to live as they may it makes one wonder whether those impelled by an evolutionary urge to better the world should expose those millions to such horrors for any end at all and whether the complete pacifist is not justified. I myself can only work it out by thinking that the sum of human suffering is not greater than the suffering of one individual, that thence human suffering in wars does not matter more than the inevitable suffering even of a comparative few and that therefore the evolutionary urge must work itself out even with the deaths of thousands of kulaks or of western European people of high and low place. And all my instincts are to loathe the Nazis more than anyone or anything else, because I feel that their victory would make human slavery more permanent than anything else would.²⁰⁸

The contrasting effect of the individual and the masses is worked out in 'An Cuilithionn' using symbols such as the Gesto girl. She is the individual symbol who is part of a more collective suffering throughout history and by using this device MacLean can access the concept of human hardship and remove the anonymity without simply relying on sweeping generalisations. Awareness of the individual means that MacLean is also eager to differentiate between individuals and collective terms such as imperialism and capitalism. In

²⁰⁵ MacLean, 1999, pp. 210-212.

²⁰⁶ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

²⁰⁷ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

²⁰⁸ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

a letter to Young in November 1940 he expresses distaste at MacDiarmid's 'anglophobia'.²⁰⁹ Although he still respects many of MacDiarmid's ideals he has developed enough of his own ideas since his time within Scottish intellectual circles to see certain flaws in the older poet's outlook. Like MacDiarmid he wants to forge a new Scotland but his Communism overrides his Nationalism and in Oct 1940 in a letter to Young he exhibits this when he writes:

Half of our squad of 25 are Scots, mostly from the central belt, the rest are Yorkshiremen. I can't pronounce on the English yet but my first impression is that I do not at all dislike the proletarian Englishman much as I loathe the bourgeois Englishman. Perhaps that is all to be expected from me. I am not sensitive to national differentiation [sic] but very to class differentiation [sic]. I loathe the English bourgeois but honestly I like the English privates here. Most of them too I suppose are not proletarians but petty bourgeois, people of the same class as that in which I am or present myself but some are genuine proletarians.²¹⁰

These thoughts are in keeping with 'An Cuilithionn' which is greatly involved with the struggle of the masses, regardless of nationality. MacLean's view is far-reaching in the poem – he begins from the Scottish Gaelic perspective and moves outwards to incorporate an ever-widening worldview. For this reason his opinions of his fellow soldiers are understandable. It is relevant to these considerations that in a letter to MacLean on 17th June 1943 Douglas Young gives his own opinion of MacLean's position:

...you have that desire for the absolute and the universal...your Communism is a universal creed, to some extent in conflict with your Gaeldom and Scottish feeling. On tactical grounds Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism finds a place for all Nationalism but denies the ultimate absolute universal value of all Nationalism.²¹¹

MacLean's own actions after he returns to Scotland from the Middle East are consistent with Young's opinion of his political stance. From Raigmore Hospital on 15th June 1943 MacLean wrote to Young that:

As to the S.N.P. well my intention is first of all to join the C.P. If the S.N.P. will take me then, I will join but I can't guarantee to do anything for them at once.²¹²

Thus his primary interest in Communism and secondary interest in Nationalism correspond to the structure of 'An Cuilithionn' – his Nationalism and sense of his own identity are given an

²⁰⁹ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

²¹⁰ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

²¹¹ MS 29540, NLS, f. 9.

²¹² Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

important place but by the end of the poem the focus is on how the individual can relate to the whole of mankind.

The Sorley MacLean and Douglas Young letters deal with a number of issues of a political nature and go some way to reinforcing the general themes of ‘An Cuilithionn’. MacLean shows that he is first and foremost interested in the human plight and also in the best way for humanity to progress. This permeates all parts of ‘An Cuilithionn’. In the letters MacLean views the Soviet Union as the hope of Europe and this aspect is very similar to his attitude in ‘An Cuilithionn’ in which the Red Army is the liberator of the masses. In many of the letters the Red Army is given massive significance but the interesting development, which is not as clear in ‘An Cuilithionn’, is that MacLean envisions many Red armies springing up – the main focus is not always on the Soviet Union. While MacLean denies a serious interest in MacDiarmid’s politics at the time of the letters being written, parallels can nevertheless be drawn between MacLean’s idea of a Scottish Red army and MacDiarmid’s so called ‘Gaelic Idea’ which he saw as necessary to counter the ‘Russian Idea’.²¹³ Many writers were exploring the possibilities of what Soviet thought could give their own nations if translated in a certain way to fit with their national identities. MacLean’s vision of the future in his letters has a similar sense of hope to that shown in the later parts of ‘An Cuilithionn’. The hope is that the old order will fall and a new order will rise and serve the people. This may be the reason for his fear of Fascism – Fascism was a power with incredible force and permanence and MacLean was worried that if it took hold of Europe the vision at the end of ‘An Cuilithionn’ had no chance of being realised.

2.4 The Poet as Subject: Critical Essays on MacLean

By the 1950s MacLean’s poetry was being discussed in periodicals and journals. Of the Scottish literati, Iain Crichton Smith was one of MacLean’s greatest admirers and his reviews and essays are testament to this. In the *Saltire Review* in 1958 he calls for MacLean’s poetry to be read widely and refers to him as a ‘major poet’.²¹⁴ In the same article he discusses MacLean’s place within the Gaelic tradition as well as within a wider European tradition,

²¹³ For a more detailed discussion of the ‘Gaelic Idea’ and the ‘Russian Idea’ see Buthlay, 1982, pp. 61-69.

²¹⁴ Iain Crichton Smith, ‘Homage to Sorley MacLean’, *Saltire Review*, 5, no. 15 (1958), 37-40. See also Iain Crichton Smith, ‘The Poetry of Sorley MacLean’, *An Gaidheal*, 53, no. 10 (1958), 99-100. Later, during the 1970s and 1980s, Smith continued his writing on MacLean. See for example, ‘The Poetry of Sorley MacLean’, *The Glasgow Review*, 4, no. 3 (1973) 38-41 and ‘Gaelic Master: Sorley MacLean’, *Scottish Review*, 34 (1984), 4-10.

thus showing that even as early as the 1950s MacLean's work was being recognised as being original and influential. Iain Crichton Smith helped to popularise MacLean's work among a non-Gaelic audience with his 1971 publication, *Poems to Eimhir*, which provided English versions of some of *Dàin do Eimhir*.²¹⁵

When surveying the literary criticism of MacLean's work it is important to place it in context with Gaelic criticism in general. It was perhaps John MacInnes's essays such as 'Death of a Language'²¹⁶ which encouraged advanced and serious study of the Gaelic language, culture and literature and which aligned it with what was going on in other fields of literary study.²¹⁷ Certainly, MacInnes's articles on MacLean in the late 1970s and 1980s managed to highlight the many layers in MacLean's work. In their insight into Gaelic influences and background, articles such as 'Hallaig: A Note' and 'A Radically Traditional Voice: Sorley MacLean and the Evangelical Background'²¹⁸ show the depth that MacInnes was striving for regarding his study into the mind of the poet. There were also reviews by various critics, in both Gaelic and English, of MacLean's collection of poems, *Reothairt is Contraigh*, which was published in 1977.²¹⁹ However, due to limited space, these reviewers were unable to go into major detail in specific poems and more often than not concentrated on discussing major themes in MacLean's work, which was nevertheless important to establish before further study was conducted.

Perhaps the most significant publication relating to a variety of areas of Sorley MacLean's work was *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays*, which was published in 1986 and was edited by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry. This book filled a gap in the study on MacLean and brought together the work of many writers including John MacInnes, Seamus Heaney,

²¹⁵ *Sorley MacLean: Poems to Eimhir*, ed. by Iain Crichton Smith (Newcastle on Tyne: Northern House, 1971).

²¹⁶ John MacInnes, 'Death of a Language', *The Listener*, vol 86, no. 2214 (2nd Sept 1971).

²¹⁷ For instance, MacInnes's article on the Panegyric Code is an excellent example of a Structuralist approach to Gaelic scholarship which would have been well understood within the field of English literature and literary theory. See John MacInnes, 'The Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry and its Historical Background', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 50 (1978), 435-98.

²¹⁸ John MacInnes, 'Sorley MacLean's "Hallaig": a note', *Calgacus*, 1, no. 2 (1975), 29-32 and 'A Radically Traditional Voice: Sorley MacLean and the Evangelical Background', *Cenchrastus*, 7 (1981-82), 14-17.

²¹⁹ See for example, Derick Thomson, 'Lèirmheas air Reothairt is Contraigh/ Spring-Tide and Neap-Tide', *Gairm*, 101 (1977-78), 94-96. C.A. MacLellan, 'Review of Reothairt is Contraigh/ Spring-Tide and Neap-Tide', *Lines Review*, 61 (1977), 44-46 and William Neill, 'Review of Reothairt is Contraigh/ Spring-Tide and Neap-Tide', *Chapman*, 20 (1979), 33-38.

Aonghas MacNeacail, Iain Crichton Smith, Douglas Sealy and William Gillies. According to Joy Hendry, it was intended ‘as a tribute and as a critical estimate, of interest both to the professional scholar and to the general reader.’²²⁰ The idea came from Sorley MacLean’s 70th birthday celebrations held in Edinburgh in 1981 and was meant to be a ‘more permanent and tangible tribute to Scotland’s greatest living poet.’²²¹ The essays cover a wide variety of topics and provide a very good overview of all of the areas in which MacLean has had an impact within the Scottish Gaelic world and beyond. Joy Hendry provides a detailed biographical essay, of which MacLean provided much of the material himself,²²² while James Caird supplies reminiscences about MacLean and his time as a student in the 1930s.²²³ A variety of essays deal with his contribution to modern literary criticism, his campaigns for Gaelic in Scottish education, his influence on other poets and his use of language and metre in his work.²²⁴ Other essays concentrate on MacLean’s poetry in relation to his literary and cultural influences, symbolism and themes.²²⁵

Of all the essays in the collection the one which deals most directly with MacLean’s politics is ‘Marx, MacDiarmid and MacLean’ by Raymond J. Ross. Ross, one of the founder

²²⁰ Ross and Hendry, 1986, p. i.

²²¹ Ross and Hendry, 1986, p. i.

²²² Ross and Hendry, 1986, p. ii. See Hendry, 1986, pp. 9-38.

²²³ Caird, 1986, pp. 39-43.

²²⁴ See Gillies, 1986, pp. 185-200; Aonghas MacNeacail ‘Questions of Prestige: Sorley MacLean and the Campaign for Equal Status for Gaelic in Scottish Education’ in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 201-210; John MacInnes, ‘Language, Metre and Diction in the Poetry of Sorley MacLean’ in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 137-153; Iain Crichton Smith, ‘A Poet’s Response to Sorley MacLean’ in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 45-51.

²²⁵ See Tomas Mac Síomóin, ‘Poet of Conscience: The Old and New in the Poetry of Sorley MacLean’ in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 109-125; Terence McCaughey, ‘Sorley MacLean: Continuity and Transformation of Symbols’ in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 127-135; John Herdman, ‘The Ghost Seen by the Soul: Sorley MacLean and the Absolute’ in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 165-175. Mac Síomóin investigates the way in which MacLean uses the influence of traditional Gaelic love lyrics and the conventions of courtly love in *Dàin do Eimhir* while still managing to compose modern poetry which has at its centre an existentialist sense of the eternal. McCaughey explores a traditional influence of another sort in MacLean’s work when he looks at the effect that a Presbyterian background may have had on MacLean with emphasis on language and imagery. Herdman concentrates on MacLean’s search for the unattainable thing which is just beyond his grasp, stating that this search for the absolute is of primary importance to MacLean’s poetry, and quoting Kierkegaard’s *Fear and Trembling* in which the philosopher uses the motif of self-sacrifice to explain the need for a spiritual state that opens up the limits of possibility.

editors of *Cencrastus*, is a scholar who specialises in MacDiarmid so his interest is understandably within the area of MacLean's political beliefs and the friendship that flourished between the two poets. The early part of the essay deals with MacLean's commitment to Socialism in relation to his love of 'Eimhir', thus Ross's main source of consultation is *Dàin do Eimhir* with reference to MacLean's dilemma between action and inaction; political passion and poetic passion; duty and love. Ross emphasises MacLean's commitment to action, writing that:

Sorley MacLean, then, stands in relation to the Gaelic revival in much the same way as does MacDiarmid to the Scots revival. Both brought their respective poetic media abreast of twentieth century requirements and both sought to combine the political with the aesthetic. Much of MacLean's subject matter, embodying as it does a Marxist outlook, is political, especially in those poems which are concerned with the rise of fascism, the Spanish Civil War, the Second World War, and, most recently, the possibility of nuclear destruction.²²⁶

Ross goes on to cite MacLean's statement that he 'could not have been an Iain Lom at Inverlochy or an Auden in America in 1939'²²⁷, further strengthening the argument that MacLean prided himself on being a man of action. Ross's essay also does much to dispel the idea that MacLean's political ideals were not based on realistic arguments and instead existed on a specifically Romantic level. He expresses bewilderment that others do not see the realism of MacLean's politics:

Given his over-riding political passion it is perhaps surprising how some critics have refused to accept MacLean's engagement with Marxism at any profound level and have sought to limit it to a superficial or Romantic attraction. Iain Crichton Smith, for example, sees "no evidence of much other than an emotional commitment" to communism in MacLean's poetry, and notes that, "In this he is unlike MacDiarmid who does give the impression that he has actually *read* some of the texts."²²⁸

Ross views MacLean's main political theme in his work as the 'desire to put the people's anguish into his poetry and to embody "the voice of the poor martyrs".'²²⁹ Considering Ross's emphasis on this aspect of MacLean's poetic vision he gives very little space in the essay to

²²⁶ Raymond J. Ross, 'Marx, MacDiarmid and MacLean' in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 91-107 (p. 92).

²²⁷ Ross, 1986, p. 92. This statement is quoted from Sorley MacLean, 1985, p. 12.

²²⁸ Ross, 1986, p. 101.

²²⁹ Ross, 1986, p. 101. The desire to show the suffering of the masses is a socialist principle that MacLean held from an early age and while this is an important theme in MacLean's work it is, nevertheless, only one part of the greater whole – John MacInnes has highlighted what could be seen as the opposing factor in MacLean's poetry which centres on the influence that the language used in Free Presbyterian sermons has had on his poetry. See MacInnes, 1981-82, pp. 14-17. It is testament to the richness of MacLean's poetry that his influences range from extreme left-wing politics to religious imagery and language and it is important that scholars of MacLean's poetry are aware of all the facets of his art – MacLean may dismiss religion but its imagery is never far from his work.

discussion of ‘An Cuilithionn’, preferring to discuss the shorter lyrical poems such as ‘Árd-Mhusaeum na h-Éireann’ and ‘Am Botal Briste’. One reason for the lack of attention to ‘An Cuilithionn’ may be MacLean’s own lack of satisfaction with it – Ross quotes MacLean’s letter to MacDiarmid in which he writes that ‘An Cuilithionn’ was ‘a crude declamatory poem’.²³⁰ In the mid-eighties, when MacLean was still voicing opinions on his own work it would have been understandable that writers may have been swayed by the poet’s own personal opinions – it may be that Ross was writing about ‘An Cuilithionn’ at a time when people were still too close to the material and the poet himself and it is only now at the present time that poems such as ‘An Cuilithionn’ can be fairly viewed and thus given a better chance to emerge in their own right as a significant part of MacLean’s work.

Robert Calder is one contributor to this collection of critical essays who attempts to look back at ‘An Cuilithionn’ and place it in context with later work by MacLean in the essay ‘Celebration of a Tension’.²³¹ He begins by acknowledging MacLean’s need for a resolution in ‘An Cuilithionn’ and suggests that it is through Promethean political action that the poet manages to look towards the future. In relation to this, Calder quotes from one of MacLean’s 1970s poems, ‘Palach’, which refers to the self-immolation of a Prague student, Jan Palach, who martyred himself in protest of the Soviet defeat of the humane regime which Dubcek had tried to introduce by reforming the politics of Czechoslovakia.²³² Calder shows how MacLean’s line of thought has not changed greatly over the years, despite his changes of opinion regarding specific political parties and regimes – he retains his desire to climb the mountain, ascending to higher realms of thought and feeling in order to attain awareness as can be seen in poems such as ‘Creag Dallaig’.²³³ Throughout the essay Calder continues to study the later poems of MacLean and assess how they have been influenced by his earlier thought processes – he comes to the conclusion that the mountain is still important to MacLean’s poetry, despite there being a lack of hope for the world at that time. The late 1930s seemed to signal an end of optimistic revolutionary politics with World War II heralding a darker time but Calder shows that MacLean’s outlook has not changed drastically. The poet is still striving for an end to oppression and cruelty and Calder mentions a later poem, ‘A’ Bheinn air Chall’, in relation to this:

²³⁰ Ross, 1986, p. 96.

²³¹ Calder, 1986, pp. 155-163.

²³² Calder, 1986, p. 155.

²³³ Calder, 1986, p. 155.

That human suffering has been made presently real to him; the horror at the oppression and cruel death of people has swelled into a yearning to change all that, to make of ‘A’ Bheinn air Chall’ MacLean’s ‘Prometheus Bound’...MacLean is Promethean in the extent of his moral striving. He has given fire to himself and with MacDiarmid said, “To Hell with my *own* happiness”: he would send nobody out to be shot, but like his Polish contemporary and others has risked being shot himself.²³⁴

Calder likens the middle aged MacLean to Prometheus – ‘tormented by inhumanity world-wide’ – but he pinpoints the tension in MacLean’s poetry as being between the feelings of torment and self-sacrifice and the belief he still holds in beauty and love as shown in another later poem, ‘Cumha Chaluim Iain MhicGill-Eain’.²³⁵ Calder concludes his essay with the suggestion that what sustains MacLean and his poetry is the ‘passionate marriage of love with knowledge, which is not always a comfortable one...’²³⁶ This article is useful in a study of MacLean’s political poetry because it looks at the earlier and the later poetry of MacLean and shows how the poet’s ideas have been sustained throughout a changing political scene. This is significant because by studying ‘An Cuilithionn’ in light of later poetry Calder indicates that ‘An Cuilithionn’ is not dated and is in fact part of a larger picture – just as beauty in MacLean’s poetry is not confined to one symbol e.g. Eimhir, so too is MacLean’s political symbolism not embodied solely in the Red Army and Lenin. Thus, Calder’s essay shows that the message in ‘An Cuilithionn’ was carried on despite changes in specific details such as disillusionment with the Soviet Union. MacLean’s political ideals are shown to be more permanent than simple youthful optimism and thus they take on a greater significance in his overall poetic vision.

In the years after *Critical Essays* was published, many of the articles on MacLean involved reviews of *O Choille gu Bearradh/ From Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems*, which was first published in 1989 and gave readers a fuller insight into MacLean’s overall work. It also gave readers access to ‘An Cuilithionn’ in Gaelic and English. In 1992 Máire Ní Annracháin was the first academic to publish a monograph specifically on the subject of MacLean’s work. In *Aisling agus Tóir: An Slánú i bhFilíocht Shomhairle MhicGill-Eain*, she studies the interaction between the themes of vision and quest, dedicating specific chapters to ‘Coilltean Ratharsair’, ‘Hallaig’, ‘Uamha ’n Oir’ and ‘Coin is Madaidhean-Allaidh’ as well as a chapter

²³⁴ Calder, 1986, p. 161.

²³⁵ Calder, 1986, p. 163.

²³⁶ Calder, 1986, p. 163.

on shorter poems such as ‘Gaoir na h-Eòrpa’, ‘An Roghainn’ and ‘Tràighean.’ She draws on the likes of Freud, Cixous, Saussure and Jakobson in the course of her book and it is an ambitious work in the field of Gaelic studies.²³⁷ Another development in the scholarship on MacLean, which can be detected in the late 1980s and 1990s, is the incorporation of MacLean into the Scottish canon with entries in books such as *The History of Scottish Literature*, *The New Companion to Scottish Culture*, and, in 2004, *Modern Scottish Poetry*.²³⁸ During these years, articles expressing an appreciation of MacLean’s work were also published in other languages;²³⁹ articles in Irish were the principal of these, mainly due to Ireland’s closeness to Scotland and the shared culture and language similarities.²⁴⁰

2.5 ‘An Cuilithionn’: Entering into a Fuller Study of the Text

In 1997 Máiri Ní Annracháin was one of the first critics to study ‘An Cuilithionn’ in the form of a full article, ‘Vision and Quest in Somhairle MacGill-Eain’s “An Cuilithionn”’²⁴¹, which she wrote to tackle the same themes that she deals with in her book, *Aisling agus Tóir: An Slánú i bhFilíocht Shomhairle MhicGill-Eain*.²⁴² In the article she argues that there is tension and interplay between the vision and quest in the poem and that this is connected with the struggle between life and death and evil and redemption.²⁴³ The visions that MacLean has are of the dead figures of history, most often those involved with political liberation, or in the case of the dead villains, those that oppressed the masses. The quest is inextricably linked to the vision in that it is about action towards ‘the goal of liberation from overwhelming moral

²³⁷ Máire Ní Annracháin, *Aisling agus Tóir: An Slánú i bhFilíocht Shomhairle MhicGill-Eain* (Maynooth, Ireland: An Sagart, 1992).

²³⁸ Terence McCaughey, ‘Somhairle MacGill-eain’, in *The History of Scottish Literature, vol 4, Twentieth Century*, ed. by Cairns Craig (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987), pp. 147-63. Donald MacAulay, ‘MacLean, Sorley/ Somhairle MacGill-Eain’ in *The New Companion to Scottish Culture*, ed. by David Daiches (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1993) pp. 206-07. Christopher Whyte, *Modern Scottish Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) pp. 63-91.

²³⁹ See for example, Henri Gibault, ‘Sorley MacLean (1911-1996)’, *Études Écossaises*, 4 (1997), 11-17.

²⁴⁰ See for example, Breandán Ó Doibhlin, ‘Mórfhile Ghael Albain’, *Irisleabhar Mhá Nuad*, (1973), 9-35 and Tomás Mac Síomóin, ‘An Coinsias Ciapha: Buntéama i bhFilíocht Shomhairle MhicGill-Eain’, *Comhar*, 45, no. 6 (1986), 23.4.

²⁴¹ Máire Ní Annracháin, ‘Vision and Quest in Somhairle MacGill-Eain’s “An Cuilithionn”’, *Lines Review* 141 (1997) pp. 5-11.

²⁴² Ní Annracháin, 1992.

²⁴³ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 6.

evil: clearances, tyranny, oppression, slavery...'²⁴⁴ Ní Annracháin views MacLean's Skye as a 'Paradise fallen from grace in the process of history' and she is keen to show the influence of traditional Gaelic society on MacLean, highlighting the use of heroes of the past as being 'true to the spirit of Gaelic heroic war poetry.'²⁴⁵ She also interprets MacLean's relationship to the mountain based on Gaelic/Irish literature when she suggests that it is reminiscent of the 'relationship of the king, or indeed the people, with the land as a marriage which was a cornerstone of Gaelic culture.'²⁴⁶ Ní Annracháin puts forward the idea that 'An Cuilithionn' was composed by MacLean during a time of chaos in Europe that was highly distressing to the poet – this distress, brought on by the fear of fascism, is symbolised by 'the failure to name the last lone soul on the mountain. Thus an important part of the code of the heroic praise-poem comes close to collapse.'²⁴⁷ This idea may have at its root the theory regarding 'Moladh Beinn Dóbhraín' in which it is argued that the lack of a named hero in Donnchadh Bán Mac an t-Saoir's poem is significant and that the poet is making a comment about the society at the time – the deer symbolises the nobility of the land and the rights of possession of the land and Donnchadh Bán was aware that social and economic changes meant that there was discord in the ancient relationship of the land with the chief.²⁴⁸

In her conclusion Ní Annracháin writes that the vision and quest become difficult to separate²⁴⁹ and she shows that the boundaries between the vision and quest are undermined in the poem – the vision cannot be completely redemptive because it involves oppressors as well as heroes and even the quest is ambiguous in her eyes because some of the quests and journeys undertaken were forced upon people due to the Clearances and thus they were not in the pursuit of freedom.²⁵⁰ She states that the blurring of distinctions between the vision and the quest mirror the blurring of the boundaries that exist between metonymy and metaphor and the Cuillin provides the central example of this:

it indeed becomes not just the site, but the content of the vision, as both subject and object, in its own right towards the end of the poem...It is

²⁴⁴ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 6.

²⁴⁵ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 7.

²⁴⁶ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 9.

²⁴⁷ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 11.

²⁴⁸ See William Gillies, 'The Poem in Praise of Ben Dobhraín', *Lines Review* 63 (1977), pp. 42-48.

²⁴⁹ Ní Annracháin. 1997, p. 11.

²⁵⁰ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 8.

also the hard, challenging site of the quest-like ascent which the main speaker must make in order to see the visions. Equally, it is implicated in both evil and redemption.²⁵¹

Traditional order cannot be achieved but this is not necessarily a fault in the poem and if MacLean is trying to achieve transcendence in ‘An Cuilithionn’ he succeeds in his task because the Cuillin remains entirely itself – ‘neither figured nor figuring.’²⁵²

This article is both challenging and thought-provoking in its study of ‘An Cuilithionn’ but, as already mentioned, it confines its scope to of Ní Annracháin’s themes of vision and quest. Because of this, the article on ‘An Cuilithionn’ could be described as a follow up to the full-length study. Ní Annracháin herself states that the article ‘offers a tentative and far from exhaustive reading of ‘An Cuilithionn’²⁵³ but it is nevertheless a significant step forward in the study of a poem that has had very little attention from writers and critics. Ní Annracháin highlights important points in the poem and gives brief suggestions as to how the poem could be tackled from a more modern, theory-based perspective by touching on gender studies and psychology²⁵⁴ in the course of the article even if these theories are not explicitly defined as such. In this respect the article is useful for further studies of ‘An Cuilithionn’ because it opens up the possibilities that are inherent in the poem and shows that Gaelic poetry can be approached using newer methods more common in fields such as English Literature.

2.6 Studies on *Dàin do Eimhir* and its Relevance to ‘An Cuilithionn’

As an integral sequence, *Dàin do Eimhir* had been relatively neglected until recent years. Nevertheless, it seems that *Dàin do Eimhir* has still received more exposure than ‘An Cuilithionn’ – this may be because of the personal nature of the poems that have fascinated readers and also because these poems are shorter and for this reason appear more fully formed than a long poem such as ‘An Cuilithionn’, which was not immediately published in

²⁵¹ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 8.

²⁵² Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 11.

²⁵³ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 5.

²⁵⁴ According to Ní Annracháin in Part I and II of ‘An Cuilithionn’ ‘there are horrific images where the main speaker describes the troubling experience of his first encounter with the Cuillin. The encounter is figured both as a terrifying sexual initiation in which hell opened its two jaws the first time he kissed the mouth of the Cuillin and also, afterwards, as a less fearful though equally vividly described erotic experience. The female body of the mountain is maternal, erotic and violent.’ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 9. This explanation by Ní Annracháin evokes images of sovereignty as well as Freudian theories relating to mother and child relationships and the Feminist re-reading of this sort of psychological theory by Julia Kristeva.

its entirety.²⁵⁵ In 1999 *Dàin do Eimhir* was republished as *Eimhir* with thirty-six of MacLean's poems in the original Gaelic alongside their translations by Iain Crichton Smith with an introduction by Donald Meek.²⁵⁶ This 1999 book was a new edition of Smith's 1971 work. This remained one of the most fully-formed editions (some of *Dàin do Eimhir* were missing from *O Choille gu Bearradh/ From Wood to Ridge: Collected Poems*) until Christopher Whyte's edition of *Dàin do Eimhir* was published in 2002. Whyte's edition succeeds in bringing together all of the extant poems, some of which had never before appeared in print.²⁵⁷ This was also the first book to be published in recent years on the subject of MacLean and can be viewed as one of the first major attempts to look in greater detail at certain areas of MacLean's poetry and how they relate to his personal life as well as the wider Scottish and European cultural-political spectrum. With an extensive commentary on each poem Whyte successfully manages to put MacLean's work into context with the period in which *Dàin do Eimhir* was composed and for this reason it is also a valuable source of information for studies in 'An Cuilithionn'. However, because the emphasis is mostly on MacLean's love poems, Whyte's main political interests centre on the Spanish Civil War and MacLean's sense of duty in opposition to his love. Whyte does discuss 'An Cuilithionn' in his book but it is mostly to aid comparisons with *Dàin do Eimhir* in relation to figures, placenames and motifs. In his introduction he discusses MacLean's relationship to the lyric poem and the long poem:

'An Cuilithionn' is a radical, committed poem with a broad historical sweep which never quite matched up to MacLean's conception of it, while the 'Dàin do Eimhir', which fell so markedly out of favour with their author in the latter years of his life, emerged more spontaneously rather in the manner of the *canzoniere* which Petrarch defines in his opening poem as scattered rhymes, *rime sparse*, in contrast to his more

²⁵⁵ Christopher Whyte has given a detailed description of how 'An Cuilithionn' was published and ended up in its final form - 'C [referring to A, B, and C – three distinct redactions of the poem] designates the version which appeared when MacLean agreed to publish what he 'found tolerable' of 'An Cuilithionn' in the literary magazine *Chapman* five decades later, where it appeared in instalments, complete with an English translation, between 1987 and 1989. This version was then incorporated in the collected volume *O Choille gu Bearradh/ From Wood to Ridge*. 'An introductory note in English, the twelve-line dedication and Part I 1-90 appeared in *Chapman*, No. 50-51 (Summer 1987), pp. 158-63; the remainder of I and all of II in No. 52 (Spring 1988), pp. 36-49; III in No. 53 (Summer 1988), pp. 68-74; IV and V in 54 (Autumn 1988), pp. 58-69; VI in No. 55-6 (Spring 1989), pp. 152-63 and VII in No. 57 (Summer 1989), pp. 30-9.' See Whyte, 2006, p. 111, p. 126.

²⁵⁶ Sorley MacLean, *Eimhir*, translated by Iain Crichton Smith with an introduction by Professor Donald Meek. (Stornoway: Acair, 1999).

²⁵⁷ MacLean's 1943 collection *Dàin do Eimhir agus Dàin Eile* had omissions and the 1977 selected volume *Reothairt is Contraigh/ Spring tide and Neap tide* reprinted twenty-eight items from the sequence with another eight poems added to *O Choille gu Bearradh* when it was first published in 1989. Whyte's edition contains 'all but one of the 61 items pertaining to the sequence...VII (which possibly ought to be numbered VI) has not been located.' Whyte, 2002, p. 3.

serious Latin verse.²⁵⁸

In another of his books, *Modern Scottish Poetry*, Whyte reinforces the impression that *Dàin do Eimhir* came easily to MacLean as a passionate reaction while ‘An Cuilithionn’ was the product of his more serious intellectual mind and was more problematic for this reason:

One is left with the impression that his conscious, politically engaged self was busy with ‘An Cuilithionn’, the kind of poetry he felt he ought to be writing, while the Eimhir sequence, one of whose themes is the manner in which even unrequited love can eat away at, and utterly undermine, political commitment, emerged almost of its own accord, an unplanned and (by the poet) unacknowledged masterpiece.²⁵⁹

This sort of statement may prove challenging for studies of ‘An Cuilithionn’ if it is to be viewed as a poor relation next to the glory and splendour of MacLean’s love poetry. Firstly it is important to question whether it was only MacLean’s ‘conscious, politically engaged self’ that was behind the composition of ‘An Cuilithionn’ and it is also necessary to question MacLean’s relationship with politics and poetry. ‘An Cuilithionn’ is innately political but this does not necessarily mean that MacLean’s passionate and poetic views are not capable of engaging with politics on any level other than a mundane or pragmatic one. Likewise, *Dàin do Eimhir* may not be entirely driven by a muse-like figure – there is definitely an underlying sense that MacLean is using ‘Eimhir’ to achieve a certain state of consciousness and this insinuates that the poet is aware of what he is doing and driven by more than romantic love.²⁶⁰ There is also a passion for a moral and spiritual cause inherent in the poetry. It could be that ‘An Cuilithionn’ has had less attention because it is more dense in structure and content and also because the political content means that some passages may appear dated.²⁶¹ However, mentions of certain figures in *Dàin do Eimhir* have not stopped them being seen as timeless and eternal.²⁶² MacLean’s own attitude to ‘An Cuilithionn’ may not have helped it gain recognition but this should not stop it being tackled in critical essays since many poets are

²⁵⁸ Whyte, 2002, p. 7.

²⁵⁹ Whyte, 2004, p. 67.

²⁶⁰ Eimhir may be the trigger of his poems but MacLean has a strong sense of his role as a poet within the Gaelic tradition, mentioning and addressing the likes of William Ross in XXVI, XXXI, and XXXIII. Whyte, 2002, p. 81, p. 87, p. 89.

²⁶¹ MacLean mentions in his introduction to ‘An Cuilithionn’ that ‘the behaviour of the Russian Government to the Polish insurrection in 1944 made me politically as well as aesthetically disgusted with most of it.’ MacLean, 1999, p. 63.

²⁶² See for example *Dàin XVIII* with its mentions of Connolly, Cornford and Dimitrov. Whyte, 2002, pp. 64–69. This is by no means an isolated example – many of *Dàin do Eimhir* have some mention of the political situation especially regarding the Spanish Civil War.

never entirely satisfied with their poems and ‘unfashionable’ political content in poems has not prevented scholars studying the work of the likes of W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. Until MacLean’s relationship with poetry and politics is studied in depth ‘An Cuilithionn’ may continue to be sidestepped in favour of his other works.

2.7 Recent Research on the Manuscripts of ‘An Cuilithionn’

More in-depth study into ‘An Cuilithionn’ has already been started by Christopher Whyte, who has recently published an article entitled ‘Sorley MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’: the emergence of the text’.²⁶³ This article deals with the process of piecing together the manuscripts of ‘An Cuilithionn’ and contains a detailed discussion of the various parts of the poem with its excised lines and historical details concerning MacLean and Young’s discussion of plans for the poem in terms of publication. It is by far the most meticulous study of the archive materials to be published in an article so far and it is also the first article to bring to public attention the lyric Cuillin praise poem which was originally placed near the end of Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’ and was omitted from publication. Whyte finishes the article with a series of questions in relation to ‘An Cuilithionn’ as a whole, including ‘can political commitment find adequate expression in poetry? Or must the poetry and the politics necessarily work against one another? Can we achieve an aesthetic evaluation quite detached from any political intention, or are the two inseparable?’²⁶⁴ These questions are especially pertinent to my thesis and Whyte has certainly highlighted an area of MacLean’s work which has essentially been neglected. However, it may be that underlying these particular questions is the assumption that the political content is slightly detached from MacLean’s main achievement as a poet. Even more questions will arise and will require answers if it can be shown that the politics are in fact intrinsic to MacLean’s overall poetic vision.

Conclusion

In this review of sources relating to MacLean I have focused on the articles and books that have specific relevance to ‘An Cuilithionn’ and the subject of MacLean’s political beliefs, which will be particularly significant to the subject of my thesis. It is unfortunate that as yet

²⁶³ Whyte, 2006, pp. 111-127. Whyte states in a footnote that this article should be read in conjunction with another of his articles, ‘Sorley MacLean’s “An Cuilithionn”: a critical assessment’, due to appear in *Studies in Scottish Literature* XXXV. This publication is still forthcoming.

²⁶⁴ Whyte, 2006, p. 126.

no full-length biography of MacLean exists in the mould of Alan Bold's excellent critical biography of MacDiarmid and, while the scholarship already carried out on MacLean's poetry has been of a very high standard, it is clear that there are whole areas of his work which have had little or no attention. More research into MacLean is required if a full sense of his poetic vision is to be recognised and appreciated.

Chapter 3

Methodology

Introduction

‘An Cuilithionn’ is a complex poem with different meanings existing on many levels and for this reason it will be necessary to employ a range of theories in order to disclose the extent of the possibilities which are inherent in MacLean’s work. Jonathan Culler describes the benefits of theory applied to literature as offering:

not a set of solutions but the prospect of further thought. It calls for commitment to the work of reading, of challenging presuppositions, of questioning the assumptions on which you proceed...²⁶⁵

In this thesis I will be employing Structuralist as well as Post-Structuralist theories in order to provide the most effective reading of ‘An Cuilithionn’. I will discuss specific reasons for using different theories later in this chapter but it is important to state here that it is ‘An Cuilithionn’ which has informed my use of theory. It is essential that the literary text does not become led by theory itself.

Theory often comes from areas outside the field of literature such as psychoanalysis, linguistics, politics and anthropology and is applied to works of literature in order to develop new ways of reading texts. One of the main reasons why I intend to employ theory in such an overt way in my thesis is that theory liberates the text from a rigid, conservative understanding of underlying meanings – the conclusions that can be drawn after applying theory appear to be multi-faceted and ideas that before may have appeared to be in opposition can in fact exist side by side – they can all be ‘true’ readings at the same time and for this reason they add depth and richness to literature. This process will be of benefit to a poem such as ‘An Cuilithionn’ which is in great need of a reassessment, especially in relation to MacLean’s politics. Culler has set out a number of points that theory often questions:

- the conception that the meaning of an utterance or text is what the speaker ‘had in mind’;
- the idea that writing is an expression whose truth lies elsewhere, in an experience or a state of affairs which it expresses;

²⁶⁵ Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) p. 120.

- the notion that reality is what is ‘present’ at a given moment.²⁶⁶

With these points in mind two separate theoretical approaches will underlie my study of ‘An Cuilithionn’ - I will assess the critical systems that are contemporary with Sorley MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’ and try to establish the extent to which these systems influence his poetry in both subtle and obvious ways. I will also employ theory which may not have been particularly influential in the literary climate of late 1930s Scotland, but is nevertheless constructive in its approach to MacLean’s work. As this chapter progresses it will become apparent that the theories which I am dealing with are operating in the same way even though these approaches have been drawn from different disciplines - they all go some way to deepening the understanding of the human mind and highlighting the creativity which underlies MacLean’s work. When there exists a poet of such cultural sophistication as MacLean, who is capable of handling multiple agendas in his poetry, it is understandable that individual theories can apply to the whole work and that they should not be viewed in a mutually exclusive way - the same motif or symbol can be interpreted in more than one way.

Before looking at the literary, philosophical and psychological theories it is important to underline the point that I am employing the term ‘self’ to cover the issue of MacLean’s identity. ‘Self’ is a term which has specific meanings especially in the fields of philosophy and psychology and therefore must be used in the correct context.

3.1 The Self: The Literary Perspective

At the heart of my thesis lies the study of MacLean’s relationship with his own identity. The self was an important concept for poets of the twentieth century. Fundamental questions about the self and personal identity have been argued over by philosophers for centuries and at the present time, after severe criticism directed against the study of individualism, scholars are beginning to reconstruct the idea of the self, rethinking how western culture has come to represent the individual. Historical developments in the material and social realms, especially industrialization and the emergence of mass society, have altered the way in which individual identity is perceived.²⁶⁷ Heller and Wellbery also cite changes in the theory of psychology,

²⁶⁶ Culler, 1997, p. 4.

²⁶⁷ Thomas C. Heller and David E. Wellbery ‘Introduction’ in *Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought*, ed. by Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sosna, and David E. Wellbery (California: Stanford University Press, 1986) pp. 1-15 (pp. 1-2).

linguistics, and the social sciences as affecting what were once fundamental assumptions about the unity and autonomy of human individuals.²⁶⁸

It is clear that the self has been a force in western thought for at least the last five hundred years. The Renaissance was a time in which a sense of the individual increased and medieval modes of faith, understanding and society were challenged due to a growing self-awareness. Christian dogma sat uneasily with classical philosophy and science and by the mid-sixteenth century writers began to display awareness of the difference between the ‘reality’ of religion and society and the reality as experienced by the individual.²⁶⁹ Alma B. Altizer points out in her study of the poetry of Michelangelo, John Donne, and Agrippa d’ Aubigné that poets were going beyond established symbolizations to find a new symbolic union of ‘self and other’ that was grounded in personal experience. Traditional conventions and forms were being refined and rejuvenated in order to become more authentic to the personal self.²⁷⁰ It was no longer enough to follow conventional forms – Altizer discusses the ‘symbolic mode’ in this context, stating that by using new symbols the poet was able to explore his relationship to the world and then transcend his subjectivity ‘by creating out of his own inwardness images that embody a new formulation of what constitutes reality’.²⁷¹ In Altizer’s opinion poets such as Michelangelo and Donne successfully managed to transcend their own personal self and vision of the world. The subjective and objective were no longer separate entities and a union of the self and the world occurred in their work.

Isolated selfhood can become a self-imposed prison for the poet and during the Romantic period this was a significant problem for many poets as they explored their identity more fully in their work. Charles J. Rzepka views the main features of Romantic poetry as being closely connected to ‘bodily misidentification, the experience of a waking-dream state, a feeling of oneness with a transcendent mind or consciousness’ and ‘trust in an imaginative, introspective empathy with other minds.’²⁷² These features are often in danger of becoming a recurring syndrome in English Romantic poetry in which the self becomes dissociated from

²⁶⁸ Heller and Wellbery, 1986, p.2.

²⁶⁹ Alma B. Altizer, *Self and Symbolism in the Poetry of Michelangelo, John Donne, and Agrippa d’ Aubigné* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973) pp. vii-viii.

²⁷⁰ Altizer, 1973, p. viii.

²⁷¹ Altizer, 1973, p. 106.

²⁷² Rzepka, 1986, p. 2.

the body and is instead viewed as just a mind. From this attitude solipsism can occur and nowhere is this better represented than in Gray's 'Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard', which Rzepka views as a benchmark in English poetry and which led to an intensification of the attitude that 'the world is one's dream'.²⁷³ Keat's 'Ode to a Nightingale' and Coleridge's 'Frost at Midnight' are other good examples of this but it was Gray's 'Elegy' that first showed how the body can vanish from a poem and how the embodied being can then fail to delimit the inside and outside worlds.²⁷⁴ Traditionally the existence of the 'other' is required to define self-consciousness and when the 'other', as symbolised by the plowman, is removed from Gray's 'Elegy' the strong sense of self is weakened and the self becomes disembodied.²⁷⁵ Rzepka encapsulates the eighteenth- and nineteenth- century fear and doubt over self-embodiment thus: 'As the century nears its end, the fears expressed by Gray – fear of being misunderstood and a consequent fear of self-loss in the presence of others – will give rise to two contradictory reactions among the English Romantics, reactions foreshadowed by the 'Elegy' itself: on the one hand, a solipsistic self-diffusion and mental appropriation of the perceived world as part of the self within, and on the other, a search for right recognition that will give this indefinite, inner self outward form and definition.'²⁷⁶

I believe that the legacy of the Romantic period - which is namely, a greater awareness of one's own identity - can still be viewed in modern poetry because it is part of the human condition and therefore will always have a place in literature. Objects from the outside world can become part of the poet's own consciousness, reflecting his desires, fears and emotional states. Hugh MacDiarmid's thistle in 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle'²⁷⁷ is a good example of this – the thistle changes from a rose, to a tortured body, to the tree of life and to a representation of a phallus depending on the poet's state of mind. To a certain extent the mountain in MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn' fulfils this same relationship with the identity of the poet since the mountain takes on a personality which reflects MacLean's own vision of heroism and power as he goes through the emotions of anger, sadness and hopefulness in what resembles a waking-dream state. In Part I the mountain reflects the sadness of the people in relation to emigration - 'Dh'éigh ioma fireach agus fuaran/ o Bhruaich na Frithe gu

²⁷³ Rzepka, 1986, p. 3.

²⁷⁴ Rzepka, 1986, p. 3.

²⁷⁵ Rzepka, 1986, p. 4.

²⁷⁶ Rzepka, 1986, p. 9.

²⁷⁷ *Hugh MacDiarmid: Selected Poems*, ed. by Alan Riach and Michael Grieve (London: Penguin, 1994) pp. 24-113.

Aird-mhóir;²⁷⁸ and also in Part I the mountain is seen to be affected by the plight of the people – ‘s chlaoidhteach mi le sgread na fuaime/’s an Cuilithionn mór a’ dol ’na thuaineal.’²⁷⁹ Both these examples show the Cuillin as being inextricably linked with MacLean’s own sense of despair and powerlessness at the turn of events. Rzepka describes this as ‘an almost mystical sense of continuity between self and Nature, self and others, self and God.’²⁸⁰ ‘An Cuilithionn’ is not alone in its Romantic sensibility; many of MacLean’s other poems likewise exhibit a sense that Nature and personal identity are intertwined. ‘Hallaig’ shows how a human emotional imprint can still be left on the landscape years after an event has occurred, while in *Dàin do Eimhir* MacLean’s love for a woman suffuses the landscape so that in many cases, the landscape reflects his love’s beauty back at him.²⁸¹ MacLean would have been well aware of the Romantic outlook, having read Romantic poetry as a teenager, and subsequently coming into contact with the work of the Romantics as a student of English while at university. In 1940 he wrote to Douglas Young that while he was stationed at Catterick Camp in Yorkshire he was reading Edmund Wilson’s *Axel’s Castle*.²⁸² This book was first published in 1931 and dealt with Symbolist aesthetics, concentrating on the continuity that exists between Symbolism and the early twentieth century writers such as James Joyce, W.B. Yeats, T.S. Eliot and Paul Valéry.²⁸³ Symbolism could be viewed as inheriting some of the characteristics of Romanticism with its use of symbolic imagery to evoke the state of the poet’s soul. Thus there is still the emphasis on personal identity in relation to literature and it can be assumed from his letter to Young that MacLean was still thinking about this subject and perhaps developing his ideas in relation to Modernism.

3.2 The Self: The Philosophical Perspective

I have so far outlined some of the significant effects that the concept of the ‘self’ has had on literature. However, it is unlikely that poets would have been as aware of the concept of the individual had it not been for the historical-philosophical context. Two of the main questions that scholars have always attempted to answer are ‘what is it about a person whereby it can

²⁷⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 70

²⁷⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 74.

²⁸⁰ Rzepka, 1986, p. 25.

²⁸¹ In particular see ‘Am Mùr Gorm’, MacLean, 1999, p. 142-144.

²⁸² See Acc 6419 Box 38b, NLS.

²⁸³ Edmund Wilson, *Axel’s Castle: A Study in the Imaginative Literature of 1870-1930* (London: C. Scribner’s, 1931).

be truly said of him that he is the same person at time t2 that he was at time t1?’ and ‘ what is the referent of the first person pronoun ‘I’?’²⁸⁴ The latter question has proved problematic since ‘I’ could refer to the mind or body or both and yet even once a philosopher has decided on his answer it is decidedly difficult to prove that the other options are wrong. Plato considered the soul to be the essence of the person which simply occupied a body for a while. The Platonic soul was tripartite, consisting of the logos (mind/reason), the thymos (emotion/ego) and the pathos (id/carnal), and physical beauty was an outward expression of the beauty of the soul. This idea of ‘soul beauty’ was an important aspect of the work of Shelley and Blake. However, others such as Aristotle disagreed that the soul had a separate existence since the soul is an actuality of a living body, and thus there began the debate regarding the place of the body within this metaphysical system.²⁸⁵ This is a problem that the French philosopher, René Descartes (1596-1650), was never able to solve. He viewed the mind as the key to the soul:

I rightly conclude that my essence consists solely in the fact that I am a thinking thing (or a substance whose whole essence or nature is to think). And although possibly...I possess a body with which I am very intimately conjoined, yet because, on the one side, I have a clear and distinct idea of myself inasmuch as I am only a thinking and unextended thing, and as, on the other, I possess a distinct idea of body, inasmuch as it is only an extended and unthinking thing, it is certain that this I (that is to say, my soul by which I am what I am), is entirely and absolutely distinct from my body, and can exist without it.²⁸⁶

However, despite Descartes’ insistence that the body has no part in a person’s ‘self’, as a rationalist he cannot manage to escape it entirely, for he goes on to discuss where in the body the soul is housed and he comes to the conclusion that it is found in a singular gland in the brain.²⁸⁷

The Cartesian philosophy of ‘I think therefore I am’ is particularly relevant in relation to Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’ with the ‘journeying one’ on the mountain. In the final stanzas of

²⁸⁴ *Introduction to Metaphysics: The Fundamental Questions*, ed. by Andrew B. Schoedinger (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991) p. 199. In this section of the chapter I have relied on *Introduction to Metaphysics* to provide a general overview of the main arguments regarding the self. This book supplies essays and excerpts from larger works by philosophers who have contributed to the study of the self over the centuries. This anthology was sufficient for the scope of my brief overview.

²⁸⁵ See Whyte, 2002 for a discussion of Plato and his influence on MacLean. In particular see pp. 177-178.

²⁸⁶ René Descartes, ‘On Thinking Things and the Soul’ in *Introduction to Metaphysics: The Fundamental Questions*, ed. by Andrew B. Schoedinger (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991) pp. 202-211 (p. 204)

²⁸⁷ Descartes, 1991, p. 209.

the poem the walker on the mountain is described as ‘tannasg eanchainne luime nochdte’, ‘tannasg lom cridhe’ and ‘samhla an spioraid’, with little reference to a physical body and thus for MacLean, the ‘thinking being’ appears to take a central position as distinct and separate from any sort of body at this stage. This is only one theory regarding MacLean’s poem and I am not suggesting that MacLean takes a solely Cartesian view. In the later stages of the thesis I will be exploring other possible explanations regarding MacLean’s recurring motif of the brain, heart and spirit.²⁸⁸

John Locke (1632-1704), the English philosopher who, as an empiricist, opposed Descartes’ rationalism, also finds it difficult to deny the body in relation to the self, writing that ‘the body too goes into the making of the man’, but he sees personal identity as consisting of consciousness and not substance, defining it as:

That conscious thinking thing, (whatever substance, made up of whether spiritual, or material or simple or compound, it matters not) which is sensible, or conscious of pleasure and pain, capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself as far as that consciousness extends.²⁸⁹

Because the mind/body argument could not be thoroughly worked through to a suitable conclusion memory was introduced as a way of linking the mind and body together and establishing a way of pinpointing personal identity. John Locke discusses memory in relation to the self but the conclusions are not satisfactory because there is always the chance that memory will fail:

...But yet possibly it will still be objected, - suppose I wholly lose the memory of some parts of my life, beyond a possibility of retrieving them, so that perhaps I shall never be conscious of them again; yet am I not the same person that did those actions, had those thoughts that I was once conscious of, though I have now forgot them?
...But if it be possible for the same man to have distinct incommunicable consciousness at different times, it is past doubt the same man would at different times make different persons.²⁹⁰

Joseph Butler (1692-1752), an English bishop, theologian and philosopher, wrote an essay on personal identity in which he dismisses memory as being the key to the self, since

²⁸⁸ See footnote 298 for a different perspective regarding this point.

²⁸⁹ John Locke, ‘The Body, the Soul, and the Person’ in *Introduction to Metaphysics: The Fundamental Questions*, ed. by Andrew B. Schoedinger (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991) pp. 212-221 (p. 217)

²⁹⁰ Locke, 1991, p. 218.

consciousness is successive and is constantly changing as a person goes through life.²⁹¹ The Scottish philosopher and economist, David Hume (1711-1776) points out that memory may be the principle *source* of the belief in the existence of the self but, nevertheless, memory does not constitute personal identity.²⁹² He was influenced by Locke and was likewise an empiricist, denying that there could be a distinction between the features of a person and the self that contains those features. He writes:

We are never intimately conscious of anything but a particular perception, man is a bundle or collection of different perceptions which succeed one another with an inconceivable rapidity and are in perpetual flux and movement.²⁹³

Hume viewed the soul as a commonwealth that retains its identity by being made up of differing yet related, ever-changing elements – he rejected the idea of an enduring core substance. Hume can be likened to Locke in this respect since both men define the self as a continuing consciousness which began life as a ‘blank slate’.

It seems that in the past philosophers have had most trouble trying to define and describe a whole, coherent self. Thoughts, feelings and even memories can go some way towards forming a sense of self but ‘an nì do-ruighinn’²⁹⁴ can never be completely accessed. Certainly, this was Hume’s view in his *Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding* when he dismissed the notion that the ‘self’ as a mental ‘immaterial substance’ could be fully perceived:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.²⁹⁵

According to Rzepka it was Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) who formulated the principle of internal coherence, so that this ‘who’ of consciousness was not just a series of isolated sensations.²⁹⁶ Kant was a German philosopher who had great admiration for Hume and who is viewed as being the last major philosopher of the Enlightenment. Kant is credited for

²⁹¹ Joseph Butler, ‘Of Personal Identity’ in *Introduction to Metaphysics: The Fundamental Questions*, ed. by Andrew B. Schoedinger (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991) pp. 222-226.

²⁹² David Hume, ‘On Personal Identity’ in *Introduction to Metaphysics: The Fundamental Questions*, ed. by Andrew B. Schoedinger (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991) pp. 227-232.

²⁹³ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I, IV (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967) p. vi.

²⁹⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 128.

²⁹⁵ Rzepka, 1986, p. 11.

²⁹⁶ Rzepka, 1986, p. 11.

beginning the modern European metaphysics of personal identity – the self was to be seen as the power and not the object of perception.²⁹⁷ However, like Descartes and Locke, Kant does not tackle the question of embodiment. It was the English visionary and poet, William Blake (1757-1827), whose work followed on closely from Kant's, who realised that embodiment was necessary to self-hood and that the spirit must be reunited with the body because the self exists in a world of other selves and will always be defined by the way others see it.

Relationship between the self and the world is the key to understanding the concept of identity and this features significantly in Blake's poetry.²⁹⁸ Rzepka puts it succinctly when he writes:

A self, then, is a body that 'means' something because *it* is conscious, has immediate ends and an ultimate destiny, and is assumed to be responsible in a literal sense: it is able to respond to another's address, another's expectations or judgements, and thus engage in relations mutually determinative of identity.²⁹⁹

I will return to these philosophical concepts of the self as a mind, body and spirit in the process of my thesis, particularly in relation to the way in which MacLean approaches the brain, heart and spirit that he envisions as being present on the mountain. At times in 'An Cuilithionn' there is a definite sense of division between these parts of MacLean's identity while at other points in the poem MacLean seems to hint at a sense of unification between them. MacLean's ideas about this may directly relate to what he knows of the philosophical debates mentioned above but his own contribution to these debates should also be acknowledged - MacLean is adding his own voice to the many philosophers who have pondered over these concepts and this sense of MacLean as a poet with his own metaphysical system operating within his poetry is an idea which I will return to later in the thesis.

3.3 The Self: The Psychological Perspective

3.3.1 Freudian and Lacanian Theory of the Self

I will now turn to psychological thought as another way to approach the poet's identity. In many ways psychology provides new methods of looking at the issues that philosophers have

²⁹⁷ Rzepka, 1986, p. 11.

²⁹⁸ Rzepka, 1986, p. 15. It is significant that MacLean cites Blake as an influence in a letter to Douglas Young, dated 7th September, 1941. See Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS. It could be argued that MacLean's admiration for Blake has much to do with Blake's vision and ideas in relation to man's soul. This is significant because it suggests that MacLean cannot simply be categorized as a poet with a strict Platonic philosophy regarding the tripartite soul, nor a strictly Cartesian vision. The body has a place in MacLean's poetry, as it does in Blake's work.

²⁹⁹ Rzepka, 1986, p. 18.

discussed for centuries. Because of psychology's principal interest in the individual, psychologists are able to delve deeper into issues about the self, using the specific tools that the discipline can offer. The two main areas that I will deal with are the work of Sigmund Freud (with further discussion in relation to Jacques Lacan) and the work of C.J. Jung. Freud (1856-1939) was a Jewish-Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist who is often referred to as the 'Father of Psychoanalysis'. He published extensively within this field and his most influential work included *Totem and Taboo* (1913), *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) and *The Ego and the Id* (1923). Although Sorley MacLean only mentions Freud briefly in one of his critical essays³⁰⁰ at least some knowledge of an influential figure such as Freud would have been unavoidable during the 1930s and in later life he composed a poem entitled 'Eadh is Féin is Sàr-Fhéin' in which Freud features as factor of the woodland in MacLean's symbolism.³⁰¹ Carl Jung (1875-1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and founder of analytical psychology. Amongst Jung's famous works is the study that he published with B.M. Hinkle in 1912, *Psychology of the Unconscious: a study of the transformations and symbolisms of the libido* (revised in 1952 as *Symbols of Transformation*) and *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1934-54). He could be described as a 'disciple' of Freud but Jung later moved away from Freud's influence when he became disillusioned with Freud's insistence that the psyche must be identified with sexuality.³⁰² Mainly the two men disagreed over the concept of the unconscious. Freud was always more interested in sexual anxiety and conflict – he wanted to delve into the history of the person whereas Jungian theory viewed a person's discovery of self as a journey from the individual unconscious to the collective unconscious.³⁰³ Thus, it could be stated that Freud moved in a backwards motion to childhood in order to reveal the self while Jung moved forwards to achieve the same result.

Freud views human society and its history as being dominated by the need to labour and therefore pleasure must often be repressed. The repression of the 'pleasure principle' is a natural process that begins when a child develops a sense of self that is removed from the mother.³⁰⁴ A baby will begin to find that sucking its mother's breast for milk is pleasurable

³⁰⁰ MacLean, 1985, p. 116.

³⁰¹ MacLean, 1999, pp. 242-244.

³⁰² Laurence Coupe, *Myth*, (London: Routledge, 1997) p. 137.

³⁰³ Coupe, 1997, p. 140.

³⁰⁴ Eagleton, 1996, p. 131.

and it is at this time that the ‘erotogenic zones’ come into play for the child. Later the child will become aware of the anus as an erotogenic zone and the next stage after that is an awareness of the genitals. This is known as the ‘phallic stage’ and it is during these stages, which can overlap, that the libidinal drives become organised. Freud describes this time as the pre-oedipal stage when the child, though becoming aware of itself, has no sense of the differences of gender, nor a proper understanding of the separateness of the mother.³⁰⁵ For the child to pass smoothly into the next stage of life the Oedipus complex must be navigated successfully. This is a painful process because it is at this point that the child becomes properly separated from the mother.

The main feature in Freudian thought centres on the Oedipus complex. The child emerges from the pre-Oedipal stage and he begins to see himself as separate from his mother, thereby entering into the Oedipus complex so named because, according to Freud, the boy’s closeness to his mother’s body leads him to desire sexual union with her. The father of the child thus becomes a rival for the mother’s affections until the child can adjust himself to the ‘reality principle’, submit to the father and detach himself from the mother. The child’s sense of self develops over time in the direction of the father – the father symbolises a place and a possibility that the child may be able to attain in the future.³⁰⁶ He begins to identify with the father in the hope that he will one day resemble him. His forbidden desire for his mother retreats to his unconscious and is repressed but it may surface in subtle ways as he goes through life.³⁰⁷ What is important is that the mother becomes the ‘Other’ for the child. Terry Eagleton stresses the importance of the Oedipus complex in Freud’s work, stating that it is central because it is ‘the structure of relations by which we come to be the men and women that we are. It is the point at which we are produced and constituted as subjects.’³⁰⁸

Despite these criticisms Freud’s work set the pace for new theories about the self and how identity is formed. Jacques Lacan reinterprets Freud in the light of structuralist and post-structuralist discourse.³⁰⁹ As Terry Eagleton rightly points out, Lacan was not a pro-feminist

³⁰⁵ Eagleton, 1996, p. 133.

³⁰⁶ Eagleton, 1996, pp. 133-135.

³⁰⁷ Eagleton, 1996, p. 134.

³⁰⁸ Eagleton, 1996, p. 135.

³⁰⁹ Eagleton, 1996, p. 142.

thinker. However, his work is nevertheless original and has contributed to the relationship between psychoanalysis and literary theory.³¹⁰ Lacan rewrites Freud's theories in relationship to language. The pre-Oedipal stage becomes Lacan's 'imaginary state' in which the child lacks a defined centre of self. Within this state the child experiences a symbiotic relationship with the mother's body – the self is not centred and the borders between the self and mother are open and can be passed through. It is not until the child enters what Lacan describes as the 'mirror stage', when the child begins to view a unified image of itself, that a narcissistic centre of self starts to form and the child's ego separates from the mother, as in Freud's Oedipus complex.³¹¹ The 'Law of the Father' takes the place of the semiotic world of the mother – suddenly the child realises that it can only form an identity as a result of difference (sexual difference being the most significant form). As language is accessed the child unconsciously learns that a sign only has meaning due to its difference from other signs. The child has moved from the imaginary order of being into the symbolic order of language.³¹²

Eagleton summarises Lacan's theory:

Our language 'stands in' for objects: all language is in a way 'metaphorical' in that it substitutes itself for some direct, wordless possession of the object itself... The presence of the father, symbolised by the phallus, teaches the child that it must take up a place in the family which is defined by sexual difference... Its identity as a subject, it comes to perceive, is constituted by its relations of difference and similarity to the other subjects around it... The child must now resign itself to the fact that it can never have any *direct* access to reality, in particular to the now prohibited body of the mother. It has been banished from this 'full', imaginary possession into the 'empty' world of language. Language is 'empty' because it is just an endless process of difference and absence...³¹³

Unitary selfhood can only take place when the child identifies with something in the world. Thus the 'imaginary' is the world of images and when the child begins to contemplate itself before the mirror it acts as a 'signifier'. The signifier is capable of bestowing meaning.³¹⁴ Freud's Oedipus complex, when the child begins the discovery of sexual difference, coincides with Lacan's idea of the discovery of language. Both Freud and Lacan's theories

³¹⁰ Eagleton, 1996, p. 142.

³¹¹ Eagleton, 1996, pp. 142-143.

³¹² Eagleton, 1996, pp. 143-144.

³¹³ Eagleton, 1996, p. 145.

³¹⁴ Eagleton, 1996, p. 144.

mean that we will always be searching for a lost thing throughout our lives – there is a gap in our being which appeared when we were severed from the mother and therefore we will always be seeking completeness once more.

A Freudian reading of MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn' would entail an interpretation of 'am falbhan' in Part VII as a representation of MacLean's own self yearning for completion – 'C'ó seo, c'ó seo oidhche 'n anama/ a' leantainn fiaradh an leòis fhalbhaich?/ Chan eil, chan eil ach am falbhan/ a' sireadh a' Chuilithinn thar fairge.'³¹⁵ The mountain in Part II, which is described in terms of a woman, whether mother or lover, could be viewed as yet another Freudian clue to the true nature of the poem – 'a' cheud là laigh mi air d' uchd-sa/ ar leam gum faca mi an luchdadh/ aig na speuran troma...'³¹⁶. MacLean's understanding of his identity in the poem could be interpreted as a Freudian search for the pre-Oedipal closeness of the mother as symbolised by the landscape in 'An Cuilithionn'. MacLean's closeness to the mountain gives the impression that he desires a complete merging with it. Even his description of climbing the Cuillin suggests a physical and mental proximity to the landscape – 'uchd ri ulbhaig, bial ri sgorraig'³¹⁷ and this is a good example of a yearning for Lacan's 'imaginary' stage in which a person is trying to regain the state of being indistinguishable from the 'other' or the outside world. MacLean shows this through the language that he uses in relation to himself and the landscape and it is most effective considering the primal 'pull' that the landscape, as well as his mother tongue of Gaelic, has on the poet throughout his work.

3.3.2 Jungian Theory of the Self

Jung places the self at the centre of his theories in a different way from Freud and Lacan. For Jung, the psyche, which is the entity that contains the self, is of the utmost importance because like many of the philosophers that have already been mentioned, he views the psyche or mind as being the key to the self. Jung proposes the idea that the psyche frames and organises the perception of reality.³¹⁸ The self is the central archetype in Jung's model – it is

³¹⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 128.

³¹⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 76.

³¹⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

³¹⁸ Susan Rowland, *C.G. Jung and Literary Theory: The Challenge from Fiction* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 1999) p. 9. There are many books which give an overview of Jung's work but I have mostly relied on Rowland's book throughout the course of my thesis because, while she gives a good overview of the main concepts involved in

the fulfilment of potential and the place where personality becomes integrated with the greater whole. The ego, one's sense of identity, is the conscious mind and within Jungian theory a journey must be undertaken from the ego to the self in order for what Jung views as 'sacred meaning' to be attained.³¹⁹ Jung stated that mental existence was a continual dialogue with archetypal forces in the unconscious. For Jung, the unconscious exerts power over the conscious mind, and he used the term 'individuation' as the process whereby the unconscious shapes identity and perceptions of reality, for example through dreams.³²⁰ Jung writes 'the self designates the whole range of psychic phenomena in man. It expresses the unity of the personality as a whole' – thus the unconscious self is the locus of meaning, feeling and value.³²¹ Within the personal unconscious there can be found repressed material as well as the 'collective unconscious', which contains inherited archetypes. These archetypes are free of content – it is only when a person fills them with their own cultural and personal images from the personal unconscious that they become truly meaningful.³²²

I think that Jung's interest in the collective unconscious shows his view of the world as being ultimately one of unification. His narrative of individuation displays the same thinking – a 'marriage' must occur between the ego and the 'Other' gender (either anima or animus) in the psyche.³²³ He also sees a need for the psyche to connect with the body, which is something philosophers such as Descartes had previously found difficult as a concept and for the psyche to connect with the outside world, which was an idea that the Romantic poets had explored in various ways. Jung uses the term *Unus Mundus* to describe the forming of a mystical union of Being – of matter with soul and spirit.³²⁴ Susan Rowland points out that in Jungian terms the body is a meaningful participant in psychic identity – 'in a sense, the body is the node that connects psyche and matter.'³²⁵ The whole process of individuation is one of healing but the Jungian self is also the place in which oppositions exist. Jung describes its structure as 'an energetic system...dependent on the tension of opposites'³²⁶ and Rowland

Jung's theories, she also examines his work in light of modern literary theory which is in keeping with the aims of my thesis.

³¹⁹ Coupe, 1997, p. 141.

³²⁰ Rowland, 1999, p. 11.

³²¹ Rowland, 1999, p. 11.

³²² Rowland, 1999, p. 10.

³²³ Rowland, 1999, p. 12.

³²⁴ Rowland, 1999, p.12.

³²⁵ Rowland, 1999, p. 12.

³²⁶ Rowland, 1999, p. 20.

points out that all of the major Jungian concepts are arranged in pairs e.g. ego/self; anima/animus; conscious/unconscious; individual/collective.³²⁷

It is interesting in the context of MacLean's poetry that Jungian theory is so bound up with tensions and yet beyond these tensions, an almost ungraspable sense of unification occurs. The polar opposites in 'An Cuilithionn' are apparent e.g. the height of the Cuillin and the deep depths of the bog, good and evil, and the local and wider world. MacLean's own personal sense of identity is fragmented into separate entities that constitute different aspects of his greater self. The way he divides up spirit, brain and heart which symbolise different aspects of the greater whole is a significant example of separate entities coming together to achieve a sense of transcendence – 'Chunnaic mi 'na chaoir bheò uile/ spiorad beadarrach an duine,/ anam aigeannach a' churaidh,/ eanchainn eagarra nam mullach,/ aigne sìor-bhuadhach gun chlaoidh,/ cridhe geal-ghathach an t-saoi'.³²⁸ MacLean is no stranger to tension in his poetry and yet despite the fragmentation that results from these tensions, there is still inherent in 'An Cuilithionn' a yearning for unification and wholeness. I would go as far as to suggest that the tensions actually highlight and encourage the search for the 'inaccessible thing' in 'An Cuilithionn' because like Lacan's 'signs' the true essence of the self can only ever be hinted at through language. In the same way, the Jungian self can never be wholly accessed but can be partially pieced together through glimpses of symbols and archetypes and it is the symbols in MacLean's poem which act as keys to the poet's self.

3.3.3 Kristeva's Abjection of the Self

Throughout 'An Cuilithionn' it is possible to view boundaries and borders – there are the physical divisions between the mountain and the watery bog beneath it but there also exist the borders between things that cannot be seen by the naked eye such as the line drawn between good and evil; the natural and supernatural; past and present; inside and outside. There is nothing particularly unusual about these sorts of boundaries – they exist throughout literature because they are inherent in human nature. However, the theorist, Julia Kristeva developed a set of ideas that delve deeply into these sorts of boundaries in literature, suggesting that they are reflections of the nature of the self.

Kristeva was born in 1941. As a young linguist from Bulgaria, Kristeva came to Paris with

³²⁷ Rowland, 1999, p. 20.

³²⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 116.

a doctoral research fellowship in 1966 and quickly began to make a good name for herself with her articles appearing in influential reviews such as *Critique*, *Langages*, and *Tel Quel*.³²⁹ She later became most associated with the *Tel Quel* group - not only was she a foreigner in Paris, she was also one of the few women operating within the male-dominated environment of this group.³³⁰ To begin with, her main interest was in linguistics but she later moved towards other theories within the fields of feminism and psychoanalysis and in 1980 Julia Kristeva's *Pouvoirs de l'horreur: essai sur l'abjection* was published in France.

The dictionary meanings for 'abject' are: utterly wretched and hopeless; miserable, forlorn and dejected; indicating humiliation and submission; contemptible, despicable, servile. 'Abject' comes from the Latin *abjectus* meaning thrown or cast away. Kristeva takes this idea of something 'cast away' and constructs her theory of abjection from it, which can then be applied psychologically to a subject or used within literary theory.³³¹

Julia Kristeva states in the first page of *Powers of Horror* that 'what is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and autonomous.'³³² It is clear that the 'abject' is not the same as the 'object' – these two terms have only one thing in common and that is that they are opposed to I/the subject. The jettisoned object, the abject, draws the subject 'towards the place where meaning collapses.'³³³ Thus, a constant challenge between the subject and what is abject begins. This is a conflict that is always waiting to erupt – the examples of triggers that Kristeva gives for this struggle include food loathing, the aversion humans have toward waste, rubbish, festering wounds and, most importantly, corpses. Regarding food loathing, she describes the reaction of her body to the skin that forms on the surface of milk:

I experience a gagging sensation and, still farther down, spasms in the stomach, the belly...nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. "I" want none of that element, sign of their desire; "I" do not want to listen, "I" do not assimilate it, "I" expel it. But since the food is not an

³²⁹ *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986) p. 1.

³³⁰ Moi, 1986, p. 3.

³³¹ *Collins English Dictionary* (Third Edition), (Glasgow: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991) p. 3.

³³² Kristeva, 1982, p. 1.

³³³ Kristeva, 1982, p. 2

“other” for “me”, who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which “I” claim to establish *myself*...During that course in which “I” become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit.³³⁴

What Kristeva is describing here is the need to affirm oneself, one’s place and identity, when the abject threatens the self. Abjection takes place when a person’s identity becomes fragile – the reason that Kristeva uses the loathing of the skin on milk as an example is that the skin of the milk resembles human skin in a strong enough way for a sense of abjection to take hold. The most obvious and also the most intense examples of abjection that Kristeva provides a little later in her study are corpses and human waste. The subject expels waste – it is removed from the subject, it is not part of them but the sight of it may cause disgust because it is too near the border of what *is* a person and what *is not*. Likewise, the corpse signifies the ‘other side of the border’.³³⁵ The corpse is abject because the subject thrusts it aside in order to live but there is always the threat that the border will be crossed and death will encroach. Kristeva writes:

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.³³⁶

With these examples Kristeva establishes that abjection ‘disturbs identity, system, order.’ It ‘does not respect borders, positions, rules.’³³⁷ If rules are not respected the fragility of the law is highlighted and this is why Kristeva describes shameless criminals, killers and rapists as abject. ‘A hatred that smiles’ and ‘a friend who stabs you’ are confusing and the boundaries are unclear – this is the place where abjection comes into play.³³⁸

Kristeva’s study of abjection in the first part of *Powers of Horror* has been concerned with the basic meaning and more outward cases of abjection. *Powers of Horror* does not stop here but delves into the abjection of the self and the implications that this can have on art. The desire for something just beyond our grasp - the yearning for something that is lost forever - is bound up with Kristeva’s theory of abjection. Kristeva states that ‘abjection is elaborated

³³⁴ Kristeva, 1982, p. 3.

³³⁵ Kristeva, 1982, p. 3.

³³⁶ Kristeva, 1982, p. 4.

³³⁷ Kristeva, 1982, p. 4.

³³⁸ Kristeva, 1982, p. 4.

through a failure to recognise its kin; nothing is familiar; not even the shadow of memory.³³⁹ If we follow Lacan's idea that separation from the mother/imaginary is painful and that the subject will henceforth always unconsciously desire to return to the mother, it is understandable that Kristeva describes the separation from another body as being the 'abjection of the self'. The separation from the maternal is the earliest form of abjection and the mother image thus becomes abject.³⁴⁰ For those who become aware of the abject there is a desire to see the self in the 'other' and to become at one with it. Kristeva describes this passionate need for the swallowing up of the self by the other as 'jouissance'. The other is desired but at the same time is also repulsive because abjection exists to stop the subject from losing complete sense of itself.³⁴¹ An understanding of abjection is important when studying any form of artistic expression. Kristeva writes that the process of creating literature and other art forms is a way of purifying the abject³⁴² – by symbolically acting out repressed ideas and emotions repetitively the poet or artist is cathartically cleansing themselves of tensions.

Kristeva's theory of abjection is invaluable as a tool to study Sorley MacLean's work. The abject is an underlying presence throughout 'An Cuilthionn'. It can be seen on many levels – the abject is the evil morass under the Cuillin, the rotting carcasses of the slain, the people throughout history that have committed acts of cruelty and treachery against the masses and, on a far more personal level, the abject can be located in MacLean's symbolic landscape in his direct meeting with the 'mother' in the form of the Skye landscape. The idea of the unstable subject that is constantly experiencing a crisis of identity within its process of change is particularly relevant when considering modernist literature and is the main reason why so many of Kristeva's theories have been applied so convincingly to the works of modernists such as James Joyce and T.S. Eliot. Movement across boundaries is not only possible, but also virtually unavoidable for the modern subject.

MacLean was greatly influenced by Modernism. By the time modernist texts were being published literature as a whole had become de-centred and literature was mirroring changes in society by questioning approaches to style, rhythm and subject. MacLean carried the

³³⁹ Kristeva, 1982, p. 5.

³⁴⁰ Kristeva, 1982, p. 13.

³⁴¹ Kristeva, 1982, pp. 9-10.

³⁴² Kristeva, 1982, p. 17.

influence of this literature into his own work. It is significant that linguistic semiotic theory can be applied effectively to the work of modernist writers. This is due to the fact that during this period important experimentation with language and rhythm was taking place that later theorists such as Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous would describe as a move away from the 'Law of the Father' and towards a 'maternal' or 'feminine' form of writing in an attempt to access the semiotic i.e. the writers' own unconscious drives. If theories of the semiotic and abjection can be used successfully in relation to writers such as T.S. Eliot, Samuel Beckett and James Joyce, they may be effective when applied to the work of Sorley MacLean. Despite differences in style and language MacLean can be aligned with James Joyce. Joyce concentrates on finding his identity through the English language by using his Irish linguistic heritage to distort English almost beyond recognition, thereby achieving a 'feminine' mode of writing through this rebellion.³⁴³ On the other hand, MacLean takes the influence of modernist English literature but returns to his mother-tongue of Gaelic (and by association, also returns to the '(m)Other'). He then uses his acquired influences in a revolutionary way on Gaelic poetry. Both writers use the language that they have at their disposal to achieve a radical result.

French theorists such as Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous were attracted to the work of modernists such as T.S. Eliot, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett.³⁴⁴ The Kristevan line appears to be that the modernist text is anti-patriarchal, 'feminine' and radical, irrespective of the gender of its author.³⁴⁵ Both modernist writers and French theorists such as Kristeva look for new ways of conceiving the world around them in their work and this is perhaps one reason why Kristevan theories of the semiotic and abjection are applied so effectively to modernist works of literature. Kristeva and Cixous both contributed articles questioning the psychological structures underpinning Samuel Beckett's discourse in a special 'Beckett' issue of *Cahiers de l'Herne*.³⁴⁶ Kristeva also shows an interest in Joyce's work in her 1966 essay 'Le Mot, le dialogue et le roman' in which she views him as one of the creators of the

³⁴³ <http://www.themodernword.com/joyce/joyce_paper_birkett.html> {consulted on 19/3/06} 'French Feminists and Anglo-Irish Modernists: Cixous, Kristeva, Beckett and Joyce' (p. 5) This article by Jennifer Birkett of the University of Birmingham is a revised version of a public lecture delivered at the University of Zaragoza. I will henceforth refer to this article as 'Birkett' in the footnotes.

³⁴⁴ Birkett, p. 4.

³⁴⁵ Birkett, p. 3.

³⁴⁶ Birkett, p. 5.

polyphonic novel – he decentres himself as subject, which helps to challenge and explore language.³⁴⁷ Kristeva continues her study of Joyce in ‘How does one speak to literature?’ and she identifies Joyce’s use of language with the search for the feminine/ maternal in *La Révolution du langage poétique*.³⁴⁸ Other essays by Kristeva in which she discusses modernism include ‘From One Identity to Another’ and ‘The Father, Love and Banishment’. In these later studies she deals with the poetic language that she argues can reactivate the maternal element, otherwise known as the semiotic.³⁴⁹ The connection between modernist writers and French theorists continues with Héléne Cixous. Her thesis, ‘L’ Exil de James Joyce ou l’ arc du remplacement’, was supervised by the Joycean scholar, Jean-Jacques Mayoux. Cixous studies the relationship of writer, language and history, which is important to Joyce and also modernism as a whole.³⁵⁰ Later Cixous views Joyce’s work in relation to desire and creativity in *Prénoms de personne* and ‘La Missexualité: où jous-je?’. In this article she highlights Joyce’s point that language is used in art ‘to thwart the authority of the Father’.³⁵¹

The fact that groundbreaking ideas such as the semiotic and symbolic stages of psychological development have been applied to modernist writers so successfully implies that there may be significant scope for further study in this area. The poetry of Sorley MacLean may benefit from the sort of readings promoted by Kristeva and Cixous. MacLean is influenced considerably by modernist writers such as T.S. Eliot and I view it as a logical progression to research factors in MacLean’s work that have already been highlighted in the work of his predecessors by contemporary French theorists.

3.4 Myth – Theories and Approaches

Psychoanalysis has helped greatly in assessing how the self functions in literature but it is not the only way of viewing the actions of the individual. Another way of approaching ‘An Cuilithionn’ is through the study of myths since they may form a background story which

³⁴⁷ Birkett, p. 11.

³⁴⁸ Birkett, p. 12.

³⁴⁹ Birkett, p. 12.

³⁵⁰ Birkett, p. 13.

³⁵¹ Birkett, p. 15.

influences the individual poet's voice. In my thesis I will be dealing with concepts and theories of myth and how they relate to MacLean's work. Before studying the many ways in which myth permeates literature it is necessary to explain the meaning of myth and work out a clear definition for the sort of 'myth' upon which I will focus in this thesis.

Mythology is the imaginative rather than the historical. *Mythos*, from Greek, means 'word' or 'story' and it comes into Latin as *fabula*, which can be taken to stand for both 'fable' and 'fabulous'.³⁵² All of these words go some way to explaining the nature of myth. In many societies myth represents the founding story of a culture, giving explanations and reasons for the way things are. Myths may be classed as fiction but this does not mean that they are unreal – they give an air of mystery but are not incomprehensible.³⁵³ Henry A. Murray, in his essay 'The Possible Nature of a "Mythology" to Come', gives the following thoughts on myth:

Myths are the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experience intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large, controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life; that is, which has organizing value for experience. A mythology is a more or less articulated body of such images, a pantheon...Myth is fundamental, the dramatic representation of our deepest instinctual life, of a primary awareness of man in the universe, capable of many configurations, upon which all particular opinions and attitudes depend.³⁵⁴

A myth can be both positive and negative depending on the context in which it is used and in which it operates. In many instances the word 'myth' gives connotations of truth and of primal knowledge but in a completely different situation it can be used to deride something e.g. the idea that something is 'just a myth' denotes disbelief. Likewise, when people use terms such as 'the myth of psychology' or 'the myth of socialism' it is often the case that they are trying to disprove a theory.³⁵⁵

In *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*, William G. Doty writes that according to Albert Cook 'Language is haunted by myth...and the act of defining myth is an act of

³⁵² William G. Doty, *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals* (Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1986) p. 3.

³⁵³ Doty, 1986, p. 3.

³⁵⁴ See Henry A. Murray, 'The Possible Nature of a "Mythology" to Come', quoted in Doty, 1986, p. 10.

³⁵⁵ Doty, 1986, pp. 6-7.

something like exorcism'.³⁵⁶ Doty's own 'exorcism' is complex since myth can come in many different forms. Thus he is perhaps close to the theologian Don Cupitt's 'family resemblance' approach. Cupitt argues that there are so many conflicting definitions of myth that it is best to list a number of 'typical features' and then decide that a narrative has mythic qualities if it includes most, but not necessarily all, of these features.³⁵⁷ Doty states that a mythological corpus may have a usually complex network of myths that are 'culturally important, imaginal stories, conveying by means of metaphoric and symbolic diction, graphic imagery, and emotional conviction and participation, the primal, foundational accounts of aspects of the real, experienced world and humankind's roles and relative statuses within it.'³⁵⁸ He goes on to suggest that mythologies may:

convey the political and moral values of a culture and provide systems of interpreting individual experience within a universal perspective, which may include the intervention of suprahuman entities as well as aspects of the natural and cultural orders. Myths may be enacted or reflected in rituals, ceremonies and dramas, and they may provide materials for secondary elaboration, the constituent mythemes having become merely images or reference points for a subsequent story, such as a folktale, historical legend, novella or prophecy.³⁵⁹

Some of the points above will have a lesser significance in my study of myth in relation to 'An Cuilithionn' for the reason that they deal with an anthropological examination of myth whereas I am looking specifically at the literary side of the subject. In my thesis I will be more concerned with a mythopoeic approach. Mythopoeia is the study of literary works that create or recreate narratives that humans view as crucial to the understanding of their world – it is involved in the 'making of myth'. To a lesser extent I will use mythography, which involves reading and interpreting myth within a cultural context.³⁶⁰

Laurence Coupe writes that the body of inherited myths in any culture asserts an important influence on literature and that literature is a way of extending mythology.³⁶¹ From this statement it could be acknowledged that myth and literature are involved in a two-way exchange process that benefits both sides as long as a balance is reached. This balance is not always easy to achieve since too much influence by mythology on literature could result in the poetry or prose becoming a parody of the original myth. A mythic pattern or figure may

³⁵⁶ Doty, 1986, p. 11.

³⁵⁷ See Coupe, 1997, pp. 5-6 for a detailed overview of Cupitt's theories.

³⁵⁸ Doty, 1986, p. 11.

³⁵⁹ Doty, 1986, p. 11.

³⁶⁰ Coupe, 1997, p. 4.

³⁶¹ Coupe, 1997, p. 4.

transcend a text to a greater or lesser extent. At one end of the scale mythic themes, images and characters may ‘prefigure the development of a later author’s writing’³⁶² and the actual themes will have to be deliberately traced. In other cases it may just be the names of particular characters that resonate with a myth and bring with it associations, or else the plot pattern of a myth or legend may influence the plot shape of a later work. At the other end of the scale a writer will deliberately retell a myth in the form of a contemporary adaptation.³⁶³

3.4.1 The Influence of Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*

In 1890 the first volume of Sir James George Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*³⁶⁴ was published. Frazer (1854-1941) had embarked on detailed research into the history of mankind with emphasis on comparative studies of ancient cultures and the contemporary non-Western world. In 1924 T.S. Eliot wrote that James Frazer’s study of myth, *The Golden Bough*, was:

a vision, put forward through a fine prose style, that gives the work of Frazer a position above that of other scholars of equal erudition and perhaps greater ingenuity, and which gives him an inevitable and growing influence over the contemporary mind...this will not fail to have a profound effect upon the literature of the future.³⁶⁵

In 1957 Northrop Frye writes that although *The Golden Bough* claims to be a work of anthropology ‘it has had more influence on literary criticism than in its own alleged field, and it may yet prove to be really a work of literary criticism.’³⁶⁶ It may seem strange that a supposed anthropological work is being praised as a literary work by poets and literary critics but the influence of Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* on modernist texts cannot be exaggerated, and whether this was part of Frazer’s original vision or not, the effect of his work on the emerging sense of modernism must be seen as playing an important role in the work of poets and writers in relation to myth.

The Golden Bough was published in twelve volumes between 1890 and 1915 and was later abridged in one volume in 1922. It is a survey of myth, magic and religion throughout the world and throughout time. It begins by looking at one ‘scene’. Near Rome, at Nemi, there was a shrine to Diana, goddess of the woods, and her male consort, Virbius. Any man could

³⁶² Doty, 1986, pp. 181-182.

³⁶³ Doty, 1986, pp. 181-182.

³⁶⁴ For a more recent edition of *The Golden Bough* see J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (London: Papermac, 1987).

³⁶⁵ Marc Manganaro, *Myth, Rhetoric, and the Voice of Authority: A Critique of Frazer, Eliot, Frye and Campbell* (London: Yale University Press, 1992) p. 18.

³⁶⁶ Manganaro, 1992, p. 18.

be priest of the shrine or ‘King of the Wood’ as long as he was able to pluck the ‘golden bough’ from a sacred tree in the grove and then kill the priest who was already serving as King of the Wood. Frazer asks two questions: why did the priest have to kill his predecessor and why did he have to pluck the branch? These questions take twelve volumes to answer because Frazer employs the comparative method of anthropology in which he takes myths and rituals from all over the world to compare with the ritual at Nemi.³⁶⁷ Marc Manganaro describes these other myths as ‘background noise’, which becomes deafening as the cultural accounts Frazer employs multiply – he quotes historians, mythographers, missionaries, fieldworkers, translators and native informants at length.³⁶⁸ Frazer was not prepared to exclude any of the information that he had already collected, leading one early reviewer in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1890 to comment that ‘Mr Frazer delights to lead us on, like an Oriental story-teller, who ends each tale with an event or allusion that requires another one to explain it.’³⁶⁹ The same publication criticizes Frazer for pushing his theories too far and thus straining them, making ‘too much play with fanciful resemblances.’³⁷⁰ However, there were advantages to this layering of theory – its massive inclusiveness makes it resistant to attack and the mass of contradictions within a text makes it more difficult to disarm its content. As well as this, it is evident that Frazer was writing his comparative study to appeal to a wider audience. As myth after myth is described in *The Golden Bough* the reader begins to lose sight of the initial aims and questions, and attention is instead displaced to the various stories that are being discussed.³⁷¹ Therefore focus shifts from the anthropological to the literary.

In anthropological terms, at the time of writing *The Golden Bough*, the comparative method that Frazer employed was already rather outmoded. In 1922 Bronislaw Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* was published – this work was part of the reaction to Frazerian comparativism which could be too generalising and insensitive to specific communities. Malinowski was more concerned with direct experience and documentation in his anthropological study.³⁷² However, despite these progressions in anthropology *The Golden*

³⁶⁷ Manganaro, 1992, p. 20.

³⁶⁸ Manganaro, 1992, p. 20.

³⁶⁹ Manganaro, 1992, p. 22.

³⁷⁰ Manganaro, 1992, p. 24.

³⁷¹ Manganaro, 1992, pp. 24-25.

³⁷² Coupe, 1997, p. 31.

Bough remained popular, but as it lost importance in the field of anthropology it gained more importance within literary studies. Frazer makes no apology for being a universalist – he believes that comparisons across cultures can be made because the human urge for mythmaking is essentially the same. As a literary text, *The Golden Bough* has many voices and this polyphony is one of the reasons for its appeal to a literary modernist like Eliot. In the notes to *The Waste Land* Eliot goes as far as to acknowledge Frazer's book, saying that people acquainted with Frazer's work 'will immediately recognise in the poem certain references to vegetation ceremonies.'³⁷³ In *The Literary Impact of "The Golden Bough"* John Vickery suggests that literary modernists found the grand style and the pictorial terms in which *The Golden Bough* is set out attractive and the most important literary quality is its genre or literary mode. Vickery states that it is a romance 'rather than the encyclopaedic argument we have always thought it to be'... 'in essence it is less a compendium of facts than a gigantic romance of quest couched in the form of objective research. It is this basically archetypal consideration that reveals *The Golden Bough's* impact on literature to be not fortuitous but necessary and inevitable.'³⁷⁴ Poets and literary critics began to view Frazer's work as archetypal, romantic and epic.

Frazer eventually answers his original question as to why the Golden Bough must be plucked and the reigning King of the Wood must be killed. The main reason is fertility – the god must die to fertilize the goddess and, by extension, the land. Death and rebirth become part of the seasonal cycle and form the vegetation ceremonies that have central importance in T.S. Eliot's poetry – if the god does not die he cannot be reborn and thus society becomes a wasteland. These ideas were very important to what was going on in modernist literature at the time since writers were addressing what they viewed as a wasteland of society. The paradigm of fertility, of the never-ending cycle of the seasons, was at the centre of modernist mythopoeia.³⁷⁵ The idea was later expanded in 1920 by Jessie Weston in *From Ritual to Romance*. She took Frazer's theory and applied it to the grail quest, linking it to the fertility of the land and the story of the Fisher King.³⁷⁶

³⁷³ T.S. Eliot, *Collected Poems 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974) p. 70.

³⁷⁴ Vickery's comments come from his study, *The Literary Impact of the 'Golden Bough'* and are discussed in detail in Manganaro, 1992, p. 39.

³⁷⁵ Coupe, 1997, p. 30.

³⁷⁶ Coupe, 1997, pp. 25-26.

The reason for discussing Frazer's work in relation to a thesis on MacLean is that Frazer can be linked to modernist literature due to the effect that his theories of the mythic had on poets such as T.S. Eliot and, of course, MacLean could not help but come into contact with the influence of modernism on the literature that was being published in the early twentieth century. Myth has always been a prominent dimension in literature but Frazer brought it into prime focus in the early twentieth century and his mythic paradigm was later reinforced and expanded by poets and writers. His method of linking the universal with the local appealed to the literary modernist's view of a multitude of voices coming from a text and his mythic paradigm of fertility and the dying and reborn king/god added another feature of the archetype of the hero – a 'god' sacrificing himself for the good of the community is an old motif but modernism breathed new life into it. The hero coupled to the sacrificial dimension is an important idea and will be explored later in my thesis in relation to 'An Cuilithionn'. The fact that the hero-god is connected strongly to the land can only strengthen its significance to Gaelic themes since, if the universal is to be brought back to the local, man and the land have an important relationship with each other within the Gaelic vision. Frazer's vision did not become a by-product of the early modernist movement - his ideas on the mythic dimension were later taken up by the Canadian literary theorist and critic, Northrop Frye (1912-1991) and applied more decisively to literature. Frye was a highly distinguished scholar whose work includes a detailed study of William Blake - *Fearful Symmetry* (1947) and *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). I view Northrop Frye as being the main theorist to transmit Frazer's mythic ideas and to develop his principles for the benefit of a later literary audience.

If underlying mythic structures are to be found in Sorley MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn' it will be useful to carry out a reading of myth based on Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*.³⁷⁷ Despite the fact that Frye's work comes after MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn', Frye was also an inheritor of the values of literary modernism at university so despite the gap in time it is likely that many of his ideas are almost contemporary with MacLean's university background. Frye states that one of his main aims is to present a tentative version of a mythic system to show that this sort of view and outline is attainable. He views myth in literature as one extreme of literary design – the further back one 'stands' from a text, the

³⁷⁷ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy Of Criticism: Four Essays* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957).

more conscious one becomes of an organizing design.³⁷⁸ Before I study the archetypal organization and mythic patterns of 'An Cuilithionn' it will be necessary to set out Northrop Frye's structural system so that MacLean's symbols can then be discussed in relation to it.

3.4.2 Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*

Frye's mythic system could be best described as a circle with a line passing through it (see Fig. 2 below). The circle represents the seasonal cycle of spring, summer, autumn and winter with their corresponding myths and literary genres of comedy, romance, tragedy and irony. On either end of the line, which passes through the seasonal circle, there are the worlds of heaven (apocalyptic) and hell (demonic), which can often affect what goes on within the cyclical structure.³⁷⁹ The apocalyptic and demonic worlds are capable of transcending the never-ending cycle - they are undisplaced worlds and they draw heavily on the imagery of the Bible, which is one of the main sources for myth within the Western tradition.³⁸⁰ Both apocalyptic and demonic imagery manifests itself within the vegetable world, the animal world and the mineral world. Images such as the paradisaical garden, the tree of life, the highway, the heavenly city and the beatific lamb are images of the apocalyptic.³⁸¹ Laurence Coupe states:

Frye's *Anatomy*, his own mythic reading of literature, is an attempt to affirm the 'apocalyptic' vision as the permanent possibility which inspires the secular imagination. Thus by 'apocalyptic' he means, not the literal expectation of catastrophe, nor even a religious doctrine, but the imaginative anticipation of the not yet. It is the form which reality assumes under the aspect of desire, defined in its broadest sense as the wish for more abundant life.³⁸²

However, to balance this there must be the demonic world with the symbolism that desire totally rejects such as the wilderness or sinister forest, the tree of death (the cross), the city of destruction and the serpent or dragon.³⁸³ Frye describes the demonic human world as a society 'held together by a kind of molecular tension of egos, a loyalty to the group or the leader

³⁷⁸ Frye, 1957, pp. 136, 140.

³⁷⁹ Frye, 1957, pp. 161-162.

³⁸⁰ Frye, 1957, p. 140.

³⁸¹ Coupe, 1997, p. 166.

³⁸² Coupe, 1997, p. 166.

³⁸³ Frye, 1957, p. 147.

which diminishes the individual, or, at best, contrasts his pleasure with his duty or honor'.³⁸⁴ Thus, the imagery connected with tragedy – bondage, oppression, confusion, the sacrificial victim or scapegoat – is connected to the demonic world. He discusses the archetype of the tyrant/ oppressor and the sacrificial victim/ oppressed and he states:

In the most concentrated form of the demonic parody, the two become the same. The ritual of the killing of the divine king in Frazer, whatever it may be in anthropology, is in literary criticism the demonic or undisplaced radical form of tragic and ironic structures.³⁸⁵

³⁸⁴ Frye, 1957, p. 147.

³⁸⁵ Frye, 1957, p. 148.

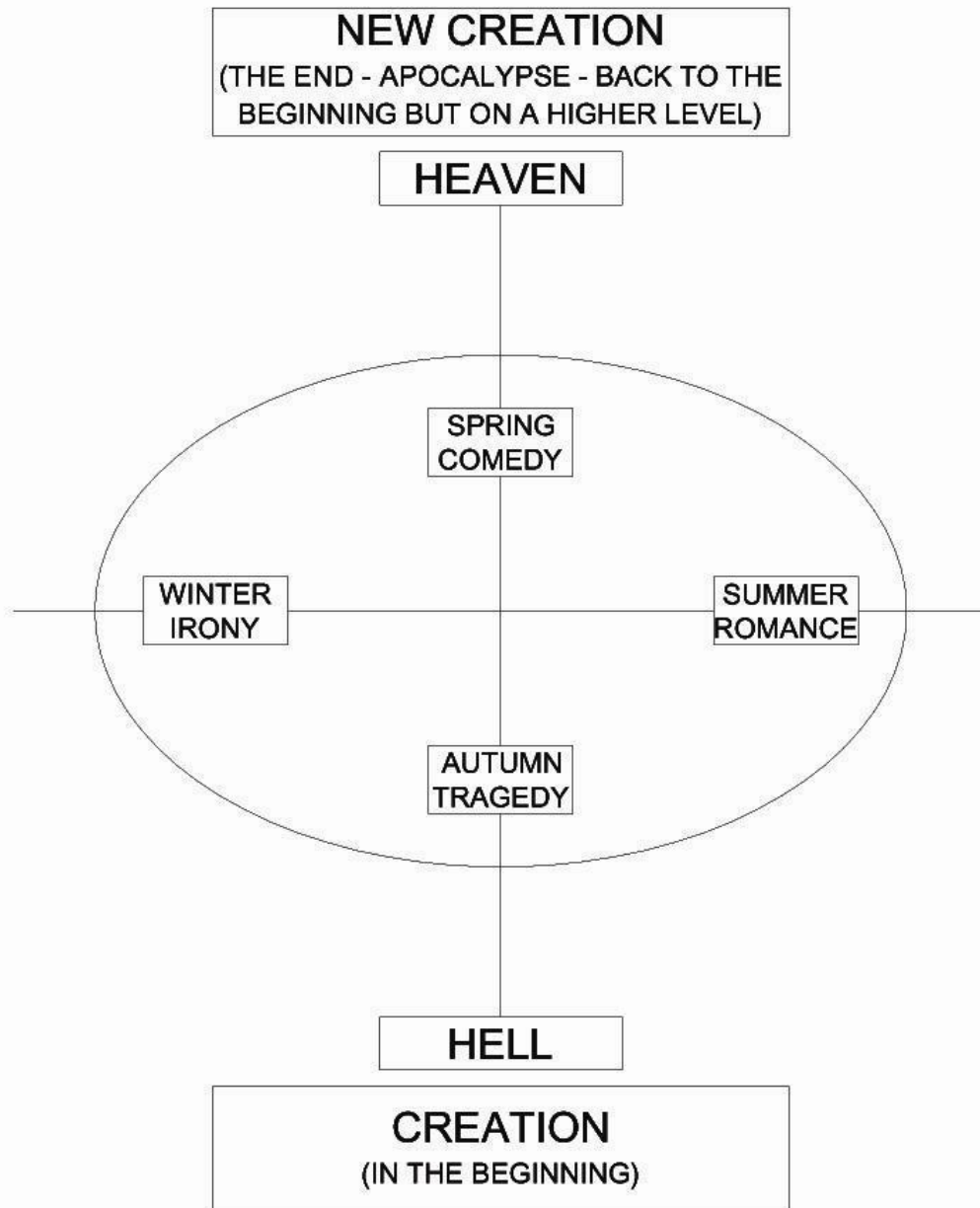


Figure 1: Northrop Frye's Mythic System

Frye sees heroism as being of central importance to the movement of the seasonal cycle and movement between literary genres. The archetypal hero is what makes the four *mythoi* – comedy, romance, tragedy and irony – aspects of a central unifying myth (see Fig. 3 below). The unified central myth is the archetypal human quest. This quest is for totality, of completeness and perfection. The ‘quest myth’ begins with the *agon* or conflict, which is the basis and the archetypal theme of romance where sequences of marvellous adventures take place. Then there is *pathos* or catastrophe, which often takes in the death of the hero and his adversary. This coincides with the genre of tragedy, which can have a sense of either triumph or defeat.³⁸⁶ Next comes the disappearance of the hero, which in some cases may take the form of *sparagmos* or tearing to pieces. This motif is found in the symbolism of the Eucharist when Christ’s body is divided among his followers and it is also present in the stories of Orpheus and Osiris when they are distributed around the natural world. *Sparagmos* is linked to winter/ irony – there is a sense that ‘heroism and effective action are absent, disorganised or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world...’³⁸⁷ From *sparagmos* the reappearance and recognition of the hero must follow – this is represented in Christianity by the risen Lord. This *anagnorisis* is part of the archetypal theme of comedy in which there is ‘recognition of a newborn society rising in triumph around a still somewhat mysterious hero and his bride...’³⁸⁸

Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* can act as a ‘literary system’, ‘an order of words’ and a ‘demonstration of structure’.³⁸⁹ At the same time it has even more potential than simply a catalogue or checklist of narrative modes. Coupe suggests that Frye is actually going further and is offering his own reading of myth as the transformation of nature into culture.³⁹⁰ The fact that Northrop Frye’s system is in constant motion means that it is open to change and to expansion of mythology. Frye views cyclical movement as the way mankind moves forward and progresses - the alternation of success and decline; effort and repose; life and death. All

³⁸⁶ Frye, 1957, p. 192.

³⁸⁷ Frye, 1957, p. 192.

³⁸⁸ Frye, 1957, p. 192.

³⁸⁹ Coupe, 1997, p. 170.

³⁹⁰ Coupe, 1997, p. 164.

of life contains movement whether it is the seasonal cycles (i.e. vegetation myths) or the cycles of the sun and moon and the cyclical movement of water from rain to rivers and the sea.³⁹¹ Frye points out that both Dante and Milton see the ground plan within their writing as being conceived of a heaven above, a hell below and a cyclical order of nature in between.³⁹² Using Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* may add a useful dimension to a reading of the poetry of Sorley MacLean, particularly in view of the poet's acquaintance with the Christian theology of Heaven and Hell.

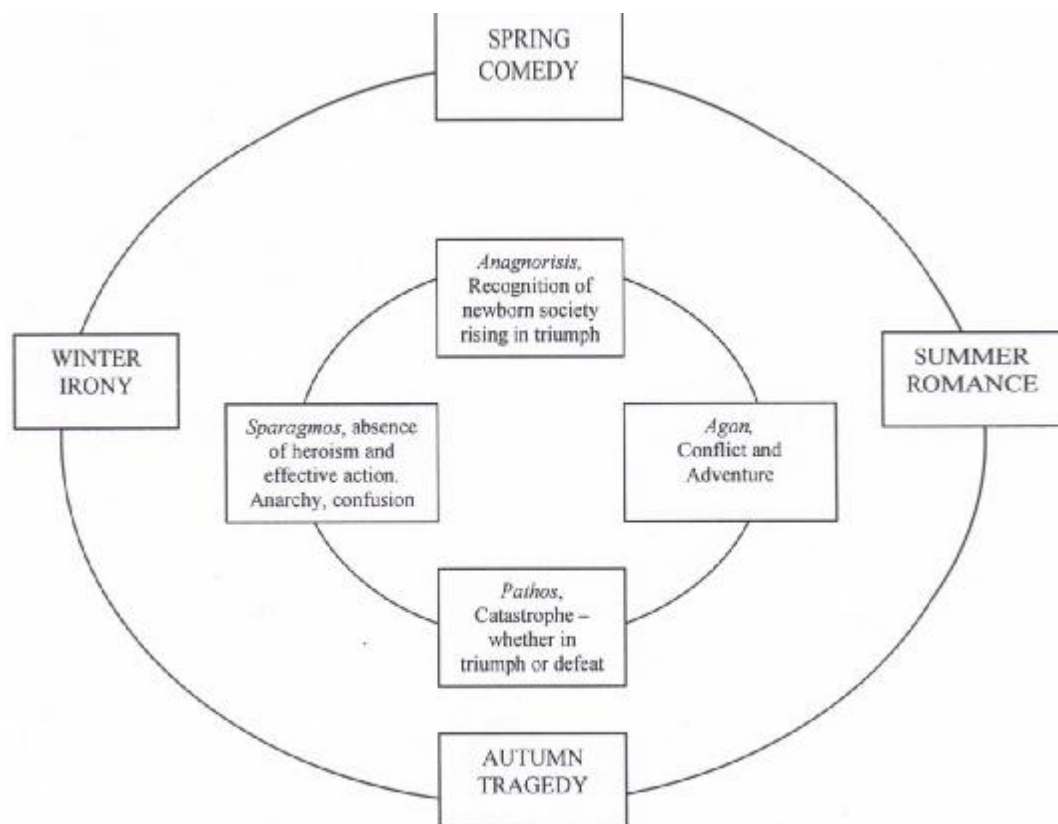


Figure 3: Northrop Frye's Cyclical Quest

Northrop Frye's theories in works such as *Anatomy of Criticism* have been criticized for losing sight of the originality of texts and becoming fixated with discovering an underlying mythic structure that is often in danger of overshadowing the message and emotions of

³⁹¹ Frye, 1957, p. 158.

³⁹² Frye, 1957, p.

individual writers.³⁹³ However, despite this criticism of Frye, I think that his theories still prove to be valid as a way of studying the myths and symbols of Sorley MacLean's poetry. The ideas in *Anatomy of Criticism* complement MacLean's poetry and I do not think that the ease with which Frye's ideas can be placed onto 'An Cuilithionn' can be ignored despite the argument that Frye's model is vast and all-encompassing. Frye and MacLean have many things in common – Angus Fletcher suggests that Frye's *Anatomy* 'treats literature as a kind of nature, a living system, a vital nexus'³⁹⁴ and MacLean holds the same attitude concerning Gaelic literature in that he is willing to keep Gaelic poetry fresh by adding and expanding the tradition while at the same time managing to hold onto some of its structures e.g. 'An Cuilithionn' is full of references to older poems and poetic metres. Nothing stands still within MacLean's work. Myth can be remade just as Fletcher states that Frye's work is 'a defence of the myth-making imagination.'³⁹⁵ Also, although Frye's *Anatomy* was published in 1957, many years after MacLean had composed 'An Cuilithionn', it could be argued that both were coming from a modernist standpoint in that Frye was keen to reinvent, through his seasonal cycle theory, the 'master narratives' that were so popular with modernist poets who felt that myth was the only source of literary power.³⁹⁶ Thus, for example, T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land' has at its heart the master myth of seasonal death and rebirth and MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn' also follows the idea of an underlying power of heroic sacrifice and hopeful rebirth.

In recent times there has been a re-evaluation of Northrop Frye and postmodernist theorists are finding new relevance and possibilities in Frye's work. Often Frye's theories were simply misconstrued. Thomas Willard points out that the archetypes put forward by Frye are not restrictive or 'closed' as critics once believed them to be. An archetype is like an empty box – it contains no politics – and 'it remains for the individual poet to put a revolutionary or conservative spin on the archetype in question'.³⁹⁷ Once a poet has added his own original

³⁹³ Manganaro, 1992, p. 116.

³⁹⁴ Angus Fletcher, 'Frye and the Forms of Literary Theory' in *The Legacy of Northrop Frye*. ed. by Alvin A. Lee and Robert D. Denham (London: University of Toronto Press, 1994) pp. 276-285 (p. 276). *The Legacy of Northrop Frye* appears to be the first book dedicated solely to a reappraisal of Frye's work and for this reason it has been an important resource in my research.

³⁹⁵ Fletcher, 1994, p. 277.

³⁹⁶ Fletcher, 1994, p. 277.

³⁹⁷ Thomas Willard, 'Archetypes of the Imagination' in *The Legacy of Northrop Frye*. ed. by Alvin A. Lee and Robert D. Denham (London: University of Toronto Press, 1994) pp. 15-27 (p. 21).

‘ingredients’ to an archetype it becomes an ‘archetypal image’³⁹⁸ thus e.g. the archetype of the hero is ‘empty’ but once Sorley MacLean has added his own heroic ideals or Gaelic-centred notion of the hero it becomes an archetypal image. This one aspect of Frye’s theory, once it is understood clearly, can change the way in which he is conceived. Within works such as *Anatomy of Criticism* the universal and the local can simultaneously exist at different levels. After all, the universal cannot exist as a concept without first being ‘local’ and this works very well in relation to ‘An Cuilithionn’, which deals with both the universal struggle of mankind, as well as a very local and specific struggle and the heroism that emerges as a reaction to this oppression.

It is reasonable that *Anatomy of Criticism* can be used to study the poetry of MacLean since Frye’s literary system is forward-moving and open and is therefore capable of receiving new creations.³⁹⁹ Also, Frye emphasises the danger of severing literary works from their cultural processes. Cultural processes and social history are both internal to literature – they are ‘history within literature’.⁴⁰⁰ Although it appears that in *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye disregards history in favour of searching for common threads in literature from all time periods, his vision is actually more sophisticated than this simplified statement of his work. Frye gives literature its own sense of history in which the functions of literary works relate to the functions of other literary works in the time of their reception. He disregards neither the history of writers and institutions nor the temporal unfolding of literature itself but gives them both a place within his theories.⁴⁰¹ This is an extremely important concept to bear in mind when studying Gaelic poetry since so much of the cultural traditions and history are inextricably bound up with modern Gaelic poetry and they should be studied as part of a whole living system as opposed to being looked at in separate ‘boxes’.

3.5 Idealism and Materialism: Political Approaches to ‘An Cuilithionn’

Throughout ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean exhibits an awareness of Socialist figures and their ideology but his poem also centres on idealist images of self-sacrifice and heroism which

³⁹⁸ Willard, 1994, p. 19.

³⁹⁹ Eva Kushner, ‘Frye and the Historicity of Literature’ in *The Legacy of Northrop Frye*. ed. by Alvin A. Lee and Robert D. Denham (London: University of Toronto Press, 1994) pp. 296-303 (p. 303).

⁴⁰⁰ Kushner, 1994, p. 299.

⁴⁰¹ Kushner, 1994, p. 229.

often appear to be at odds with philosophical materialism. Oppositions are prevalent in MacLean's work and to understand the opposition between the mind and the heart, which MacLean refers to in 'An Cuilithionn', it is necessary to examine the political theories with which MacLean would have been familiar.

In philosophy materialism and idealism do not mean, respectively, a preoccupation with possessions above all else and a willingness to sacrifice everything for a cause of some kind. They are, on the contrary, the two opposing beliefs on which much of philosophy is based – theoretically they cannot be aligned. Philosophical idealism explains things in terms of 'ideas' and 'thoughts' – religious idealism ascribes circumstances in the world to the will of God, and other forms of idealism view ideas as existing in the minds of individuals, independent of the material world.⁴⁰² Idealists believe that matter is the product of the mind and thus there will always be a part of this philosophy that cannot be proven completely, with something existing just beyond the rational that cannot be grasped. Immanuel Kant described the relationship between the world and the mind in idealistic terms:

...if I remove the thinking subject, the whole corporeal world must at once vanish: it is nothing save an appearance in the sensibility of our subject and a mode of its representations.⁴⁰³

Kant believed that 'all knowledge of things out of mere pure understanding or pure reason is nothing but illusion, and only in experience is truth.'⁴⁰⁴ Johann Fichte disagreed with Kant's view on idealism, claiming instead that the mental ego of the self did not need to rely on an external and that consciousness made its own foundation. Arthur Schopenhauer, also a philosopher whose system incorporates idealism, viewed the ideal as being attributed to the contents of an individual's own mind, thus restricting an individual to their own consciousness.⁴⁰⁵

One of idealism's main critics was Friedrich Nietzsche who did not trust absolutes or the belief that the mind was the only certainty. In *Beyond Good and Evil* he writes:

⁴⁰² Unless otherwise stated, I have relied on the *Encyclopedia Britannica* for more general information and definitions of materialism and idealism in this section.

⁴⁰³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. by Norman Kemp Smith (London: MacMillan, 1952) p. 197.

⁴⁰⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena*, trans. by Peter G. Lucas (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953) p. 145

⁴⁰⁵ See Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation Vol II*, trans. by E.F.J. Payne (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), in particular Chapter I - 'On the Fundamental View of Idealism' pp. 3-18.

There are still harmless self-observers who believe that there are ‘immediate certainties’; for instance, ‘I think’, or as the superstition of Schopenhauer put it, ‘I will’; as though cognition here got hold of its objects purely and nakedly as ‘the thing in itself’, without any falsification taking place either on the part of the subject or the object.⁴⁰⁶

Philosophical materialism is the opposite of idealism in that it does not view the mind as constituting reality – instead, its theory is that physical matter is the only reality and that thought, feeling and mind can be explained in terms of physical phenomena. For materialists it is absurd to imagine a mind without a body – they believe that there is no consciousness apart from the living brain and that the brain must be part of a human body. Materialism means that all aspects of human behaviour are the products of material causes and can only be understood when the causes are discovered. Therefore it is not enough to state that people are oppressed because of the will of landowners – the reason why this will or intention of the landowner exists must be looked at and the root of the problem (which is found in the capitalist system) must be discovered. Matter is the final reality and nothing needs to be looked for beyond that. Thus, materialists deny the existence of the spirit and attribute mental states to the brain. This philosophy is well-suited to the Marxist worldview which does not use metaphysics but instead looks to human activity in the form of such things as labour to interpret mankind and the world around him.

Dialectical materialism was developed by Marx and Engels but interestingly, they were influenced by Georg Hegel who was an idealist.⁴⁰⁷ Dialectics is about the connection between things and the way these connections then lead to contradictions. In his book, *The Dialectics of Nature*, Engels describes processes of change:

It is an eternal cycle in which matter moves, a cycle that certainly only completes its orbit in periods of time for which our terrestrial year is no adequate measure...a cycle in which every finite mode of existence of matter, whether it be sun or nebular vapour, single animal or genus of animals, chemical combination or dissociation, is equally transient, and wherein nothing is eternal but eternally changing, eternally moving matter and the laws according to which it moves and changes. But however often, and however relentlessly, this cycle is completed in

⁴⁰⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil : prelude to a philosophy of the future* was first published in 1886. See <planetpdf.com/planetpdf/pdfs/free_ebooks/Beyond_Good_and_Evil_NT.pdf> {consulted on 11/02/07}

⁴⁰⁷ See *Frederick Engels: Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy*, ed. and trans. by Clemens Palme Dutt (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1941) for a more detailed discussion of Hegel in relation to Marxist theory.

time and space...we have the certainty that matter remains eternally the same in all its transformations, that none of its attributes can ever be lost, and therefore, also, that with the same iron necessity that it will exterminate on the earth its highest creation, the thinking mind, it must somewhere else and at another time again produce it.⁴⁰⁸

For the dialectic nothing is absolute or final because the contradictions ensure that everything is kept in constant movement. This appealed to Marx and Engels and was one of the reasons why they were able to embrace Hegel's theory of the dialectic without taking on his idealism (Hegel believed that thoughts within the brain were realisations of the 'Absolute Idea' that existed from eternity).⁴⁰⁹ Marx and Engels followed the ideas of Ludwig Feuerbach who took the Hegelian theory and placed materialism at the centre of it – 'Nature has no beginning and no end. Everything in it is in mutual interaction...everything in it is all-sided and reciprocal.'⁴¹⁰ This notion of 'all-sidedness' is perhaps the most appealing part of dialectics since it asserts that knowledge does not develop in a straight line. Instead Lenin suggested that it forms a series of circles or a spiral in which nothing is allowed to become stagnant. He described idealism as being part of the spiral but that it transformed one-sidedly 'into an independent, complete, straight line, which then (if one does not see the wood for the trees) leads into the quagmire...'⁴¹¹ Lenin described dialectics as 'the doctrine of the unity of opposites'.⁴¹² This would usually be regarded as a paradox but the Marxists took this idea a stage further and linked it to materialism, declaring that the internal contradictions must be sought out. Things turn into their opposites – cause can become effect and vice versa – because they are links in a never-ending chain in the development of matter. Matter is the thing that Socialists are most interested in and dialectics show them that due to the unity of opposites movement occurred and brought with it change that was imperative for the improvement of mankind. Lenin laid great stress on the importance of contradiction as the motive force of development:

It is common knowledge that, in any given society, the strivings of

⁴⁰⁸ Frederick Engels: *Dialectics of Nature*, ed. and trans. by Clemens Palme Dutt (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1941) pp. 24-25.

⁴⁰⁹ See G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. by A.V. Miller (London: Routledge, 2002) for Hegel's full discussion of the Absolute Idea.

⁴¹⁰ Ludwig Feuerbach, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, trans. by Ralph Mannheim (London: Harper and Row, 1967). Lenin discusses Feuerbach's *Lectures* in his 'Conspectus of Feuerbach's Book *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*'. See Smith, 1972, pp. 61-83.

⁴¹¹ Smith, 1972, pp. 362-363.

⁴¹² Smith, 1972, pp. 221-222.

some of its members conflict with the strivings of others, that social life is full of contradictions, and that history reveals a struggle between nations and societies, as well as within nations and societies and, besides, an alternation of periods of revolution and reaction, peace and war, stagnation and rapid progress or decline.⁴¹³

The class struggle best demonstrates this theory – the classes, which are the opposites in this case, will be resolved and will unify when the class divides are abolished. Thus it could be said that Marxists achieved this modern vision of materialism by taking the best quality of idealism and using it to furnish their own theories. As this thesis progresses idealism and materialism will become important in the examination of MacLean’s overall worldview and I will expand on the specific points made above in light of ‘An Cuilithionn’.

Conclusion

I have shown through descriptions of various theories that MacLean’s poetry can be approached from many directions including psychoanalysis, mythic criticism and political theory. My main aim throughout my thesis will be to study ‘An Cuilithionn’ using different theories but at no time will the theory become more important than the actual poem with its specific personal and political character – in other words, universal structures and meaning will not be pursued at the expense of the individual meaning. I have chosen to use a variety of approaches so that ‘An Cuilithionn’ is able to retain its multi-faceted meaning and not become attached to only one singular viewpoint. As I progress through my thesis this method of studying the poem will begin to show that seemingly diverse theories can still result in an underlying unification of meaning since MacLean, with his acute understanding of ideas encompassing everything from the Classical philosophers to the Romantics and the Modernists, was capable of forming a metaphysics of his own imagining.⁴¹⁴ MacLean was aware of his place as a poet within Scotland and Europe and thus his worth among the intellectuals who had preceded him as well as those who were his peers should not be underestimated.

⁴¹³ <www.cpa.org.au/booklets/three.pdf> {consulted on 12/02/07} This website provides Lenin’s *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism* which is invaluable in its description of dialectical materialism and its opposition to idealism and which has been useful in conjunction with the *Encyclopedia Britannica* when researching the general definitions and meanings.

⁴¹⁴ MacLean was not the only Gaelic poet to involve himself in non-Gaelic related topics. Iain Crichton Smith’s *Towards the Human: Selected Essays* (Edinburgh: MacDonald Publishers, 1986) show that he was also willing to depart from specifically local concerns and become involved in philosophy and psychology at a world level.

Chapter 4

The Emergence of the Individual Self: The Struggle for Identity

Introduction

My intention in this chapter is to examine the way in which the self is formed and developed in ‘An Cuilithionn’ by focussing on the two main symbols of the poem – the mountain and the morass. While ‘An Cuilithionn’ deals with community and significant aspects of society in general, the self is never far from the surface in the poem. I will use both Julia Kristeva’s theory of abjection and C.G. Jung’s theory of individuation in order to highlight the emergence of MacLean’s self and its relationship and interaction with the symbolic landscape. I have already discussed the basis of these theories in some detail in my section on methodology. My reason for using Kristevan and Jungian theory in the same chapter is that the theories are coming from slightly different directions and therefore can be compared and will provide different ways of approaching the self. Kristeva’s theory of abjection is heavily influenced by Freud’s Oedipus complex and for that reason she is more intent on uncovering the origins of the self as opposed to Jung whose vision of the self is teleological – ‘a drive forwards in time or a goal of subjectivity’.⁴¹⁵ It is hoped that by applying both theories a more complete set of possibilities regarding MacLean’s self in the poem will be reached.

4.1 Abject Visions in ‘An Cuilithionn’

4.1.1 Crossing the Border of the Self

In Part I of ‘An Cuilithionn’ the abject is everywhere because the dead mingle with the living in a landscape that is dominated by the Cuillin. The main voice in the poem is MacLean’s own voice and at the start of the poem he is climbing the Cuillin peaks and admiring not only the mountain but also the sublime landscape of Skye below it with its lochs and straths. However, all is not well because he sees that the land is not populated as it once was. He hears a homesick spirit crying in the wind and slowly he begins to witness the rising of the dead – the ghosts of the lords of Dunvegan and Sleat, the factors, lawyers and members

⁴¹⁵ Rowland, 1999, p. 30.

of the gentry who had a part in the clearing of the land. These ghosts straddle the peaks of the Cuillin and look down on all that they have done to Skye. Instead of showing remorse they rise up and actively celebrate the slavery of the people and the crimes that they have committed. The Cuillin appears to be affected by their actions – it shakes as the screams of the tortured fill the air and these noises of anguish hauntingly mingle with the screeching of the ghosts in MacLean’s ears.

In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva writes that ‘I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border.’⁴¹⁶ In relation to abjection, a border must exist to separate what is the subject (the living) from what is not the subject (the dead). The abject breaches the border of MacLean’s self in Part I and this takes place immediately after MacLean has described his physically personal relationship with the Cuillin. Storm showers and mist achieve the uncanny breaching of the border between the MacLean and another entity:

Chì mi ’n sàr-eilean ’na shiantan
mar chunnaic Màiri Mhór ’na h-iargain,
’s an sgaoileadh ceò bho cheann na Gàrsbheinn
ag èaladh air creachainnean fàsa
’s ann dhiùchdas dhomhsa càs mo chàirdean,
eachdraidh bhrònach an eilein àlainn.⁴¹⁷

Mist symbolises the disintegration of the boundaries between MacLean’s sense of the present and the uncanny, in which people of the past mingle within a similar landscape conjured in MacLean’s vision. Mist assists in this smudging of borders – T.S. Eliot uses a similar device in *The Waste Land* when he writes ‘Unreal City/ Under the brown fog of a winter dawn.’⁴¹⁸ Maud Ellman, in her essay on abjection and *The Waste Land*, discusses the notion of eroding distinctions in detail. She points out that Bataille describes abjection as ‘the inability to assume with sufficient strength the imperative act of excluding abject things.’⁴¹⁹ When limits collapse and the abject emerges from the failure of exclusions it adds to the disturbance of identity, system and order upon which Kristeva puts so much emphasis. Ellman suggests that as well as the brown fog of *The Waste Land*, Eliot also achieves the effect of dissolving

⁴¹⁶ Kristeva, 1982, p. 3.

⁴¹⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 66.

⁴¹⁸ Eliot, 2002, p. 54.

⁴¹⁹ Maud Ellman, ‘Eliot’s Abjection’ in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*, ed. by John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1990) pp. 178-200 (p. 181).

definitions through his symbolism of water. Madame Sosostris warns her client ‘Fear death by water’ and in the third part of the poem, ‘The Fire Sermon’, Eliot writes ‘The river’s tent is broken; the last fingers of leaf/ Clutch and sink into the wet bank...’⁴²⁰ Ellman states that the horror of abjection is achieved in *The Waste Land* by ‘its osmosis, exhalations, and porosities’.⁴²¹ The same idea comes through in ‘An Cuilithionn’ – the evil morass is dealt with in later parts of the poem and there is also an emphasis on the divide between land and water. For the moment it is important to be aware that with the rain and mist there comes an awakening for MacLean and the plight of his people becomes clear as he moves across the boundary. Linear time is suspended and the past and present blend together. Abjection is in process at this point.

Two stanzas later in Part I the poem takes an even more sinister turn:

’S e ’n Diabhal fhéin a thog am mùr seo
a chur air falach Rubha ’n Dùnain:
cinn-chinnidh is fir-tac a’ spùilleadh,
le cead dhiadhairean a’ rùsgadh,
a’ togail tuatha ’s a’ cur bhrùidean.
Am buidheachas eile dhan Aon Fhear
a chionn nach fhaicear Loch Shlaopain
far an d’ rinneadh an daorsa,⁴²²

Kristeva places a great deal of importance on bodily experiences in relation to abjection – her best and most illustrative example of the abject is the disgust felt by a subject when it comes near a corpse since the living subject experiences feelings of fear that death will one day invade their own border. Thus, I perhaps depart briefly from Kristeva’s ideas when I quote MacLean’s stanza above since it deals with something that is not human. MacLean blames the Devil for managing to hide the wrongs that have been done from the eyes of the world. He feels that some supernatural force figuratively set up a part of the landscape as a ‘rampart’ to shield them from attention. This is not a device to remove blame from humanity. Instead, it is adding to the horror of their acts by bringing in the Devil as collaborator. There may be less emphasis on the physical body and more significance placed on a spiritual crossing of boundaries but for MacLean, with his strict Calvinist background, the Devil is the ultimate symbol of the abject for he is always lurking in the shadows and the connotations that the

⁴²⁰ Ellman, 1990, p. 181.

⁴²¹ Ellman, 1990, p. 181.

⁴²² MacLean, 1999, p. 66.

word Satan or Devil carry breeds fear in people. In Matthew ch.4 v. 10 when Christ says ‘Get thee hence, Satan’ he is banishing an outside force from creeping over the borders of his self. The Devil is an excellent example of the abject because he can remain outside the subject but, according to Christian teaching, he can also filter inside people’s minds and be part of the subject.⁴²³

Once the borders of normal physical time and space have been permeated MacLean experiences horrifying visions. It does not make any difference whether these sights are supposed to be real or figments of the poet’s imagination. The subject experiences the visions and therefore they are real to him – an extension of himself and yet somehow removed from him. At this point MacLean still has a firm grasp of his sense of self – it is not until later parts of ‘An Cuilithionn’ that the borders disintegrate further due to abjection and more than one voice is heard as the speaking subject.

Once the border between living and dead, subject and other, is opened the abject can be seen everywhere:

Feasgar dhomh air Sgurra na Banachdaich
dh’èirich samhloidhean san anamoch;
air gach baideal dhen Chuilithionn
bha riochd fear-spùillidh a’ tulgadh.
Gobhlach air Sgurr a’ Ghreadaidh
bha triùir de thriathan Dhun-Bheagain,
agus air Fiacail a’ Bhàisteir
a liuthad de mhorairean Shléite.⁴²⁴

It is as if all that is evil in MacLean’s eyes has ‘hijacked’ the Cuillin – MacLean voices disgust at the ghosts of the oppressors and abjection is at play to such an extent that MacLean’s own identity is in danger of becoming stressed under the weight of his visions. This stress is displaced slightly and the actual landscape, specifically the Cuillin, exhibits signs of suffering:

bhàthadh an caithream diabhlaidh
guth nan saoi is glaodh nam piantan,
’s chlaoidhteadh mi le sgread na fuaime
’s an Cuilithionn mór a’ dol ’na thuaineal.⁴²⁵

⁴²³ The morass, with its connotations of Hell can be linked to the Devil - the morass will be looked at in section 3.1.3

⁴²⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 70.

⁴²⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 74.

It would be understandable if it were the poet who was reeling from the vision of the ghostly revelry but instead it is the Cuillin that soaks the emotion into its soil and rock and reacts accordingly. There are many possible reasons for this – MacLean has already formed a personal relationship with the mountain at the beginning of Part I during his climb. The Cuillin appears to MacLean as having a life of its own when he writes ‘a chraosan maireann an caol eagan’.⁴²⁶ His meeting and eventual part-merging with the mountain has abjection and ‘jouissance’ at its centre and I will investigate this in more detail in the next section of this chapter. It is relevant to my discussion here because MacLean has become metonymically linked to the Cuillin. The Cuillin is suffering from MacLean’s vision but the mountain is not MacLean and therefore it is not a metaphor for the poet. He does not become one with it – there is always a residue and never complete assimilation between subject and (m)Other.⁴²⁷ Thus MacLean will always be yearning for complete union but must settle for a metonymic relationship in which signs only differentiate. According to Roman Jakobson, a metaphor condenses meanings together but metonymy displaces meaning onto another meaning.⁴²⁸ It could be that MacLean is displacing himself onto the Cuillin as part of a desire to be part of the semiotic (the maternal).

In another stanza of Part I MacLean demonstrates his personal horror at his vision:

lean an glaodh ud ri mo chlaistneachd,
 dhrùidh e air smior mo neairt-sa;
 (...)

 leanadh sgriachail a’ Chuilithinn
 ri mo chluasan ’na duilighinn.⁴²⁹

The cry is the symbol of the oppression of the people. It reaches through history to touch MacLean almost physically – a vision is usually witnessed by sight but this cry affects MacLean’s other senses. The cry could be described as a symbol of abjection. What MacLean has witnessed on the Cuillin – the abjection of the torturous cry and rotting corpses – has broken his border and partly eroded his sense of rule and order, as he makes clear near the end of Part I:

⁴²⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

⁴²⁷ (m)Other is a term used in Kristeva’s theory and also adopted by many other psychoanalysts to describe the ‘other’ i.e. that which is the opposite or separate entity from a person, specifically in relation to the feminine, whether that is the person’s own mother or a more general female presence within the world.

⁴²⁸ Eagleton, 1996, p. 86.

⁴²⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 74.

'S gus an tig an t-Arm Dearg còmhla
 le caismeachd tarsainn na Roinn-Eòrpa,
 drùidhidh iorram na truaighe
 air mo chridhe 's air mo bhuadhan.
 Curaidhean nam bochd a' cnàmh,
 'nan cloaichean lobhte anns an Spàinn,
 's na ciadan mìle ann an t-Sin,
 iobairt air as fhaide brìgh.⁴³⁰

The abjection of 'An Cuilithionn' Part I can also be described as 'uncanny' in Freud's sense of the word. Like Ellman's description of the 'Hammer horror' present in *The Waste Land*, the ghosts, rattling bones, moonlit visions and screeching cries in the wind in 'An Cuilithionn' are uncanny because they 'remind us of this inner compulsion to repeat.'⁴³¹ Far from being what is unfamiliar, Freud's meaning of the uncanny is that which is familiar – the memories that surface from our repressed unconscious. By playing out these terrifying visions in his inner landscape MacLean is repeating the horrors of the past. The torturous cry he hears is horrific because he knows that nothing has changed in the present – injustices and atrocities are still being committed in the twentieth century and therefore the abjection of the past is also the abjection of the present. Thus MacLean is actually politicising his sense of abjection and also aligning the personal sense of self with the wider societal issues that he sympathises with in 'An Cuilithionn'. The cry from history that is heard in the wind could easily be the same cry that is heard in the present. To quote a line from 'Hallaig' in a different context 'chunnacas na mairbh beò.'⁴³²

4.1.2 The Mountain as (m)Other

At the beginning of Part I of 'An Cuilithionn' Sorley MacLean describes the Cuillin in terms of his personal relationship with it. Although the Cuillin is the collective name for the mountain range, there are actually a number of individual peaks with names and 'personalities' of their own. MacLean is aware of this when he writes:

An Sgurra Biorach sgùrr as àirde
 ach Sgurra nan Gillean sgùrr as fheàrr dhiubh⁴³³

As a young man MacLean was a keen climber of the Cuillin and in this part of the poem he

⁴³⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 74.

⁴³¹ Ellman, 1990, p. 188.

⁴³² MacLean, 1999, p. 228.

⁴³³ MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

appears to be describing his personal experience of the climbing of Sgurr nan Gillean in the form of a praise poem:

an sgurra gorm-dhubh craosach làidir,
 an sgurra gallanach caol cràcach,
 an sgurr iargalta mór gàbhaidh.⁴³⁴

It is understandable that MacLean would want to describe his feelings towards Sgurr nan Gillean in such sublime terms. The mountain photographer, Gordon Stainforth, writes about ‘the titanic saw-toothed reality’ of Sgurr nan Gillean, describing it as a ‘landscape of monstrous proportions’ that is ‘fresh and raw...’, ‘as if it was the work of a few nightmarish hours or days.’⁴³⁵ Stainforth’s descriptions give the Cuillin human properties – it is as if it is made of raw flesh and blood instead of rock and has just risen up from out of the earth. Praise poems very often describe something as strikingly attractive in appearance or character using sublime imagery. However, MacLean’s subsequent descriptions of Sgurr nan Gillean in Part I have more primal connotations attached to them:

Gun tigeadh dhomhsa thar gach àite
 bhith air do shlineannan àrda
 a’ strì ri do sgòrnan creagach sàr-ghlas,
 mo ghleac ri d’ uchd cruaidh sgorrach bàrcach.⁴³⁶

The alliteration and imagery in these lines do not give the impression of the smooth ‘body’ of a beautiful woman – the descriptions are far more gritty and monstrous. MacLean is describing the Cuillin in terms of a female body and he is physically connecting with this ‘body’ on some level but the impression is that this meeting is as terrifying as it is gratifying. This could allude to the feelings experienced by any climber on a mountain – the adrenalin rush mixed with the feelings of fear and euphoria as each step takes him higher. Douglas Young appears to have grasped this idea when he writes to MacLean that:

These passages gave me very strongly the sensations of physical and psychological effort in climbing steep mountains, and contribute to the intensity of the whole poem by a stimulation of the sub-conscious. Moutaineering has been said in the usual jargon to be a sublimation of the urge to copulation. You have, perhaps unknowingly, worked on that at a few places.⁴³⁷

Máire Ní Annracháin has also suggested that the Cuillin is described in terms of a terrifying female and that the speaker in the poem is expressing a metaphorical sexual initiation with

⁴³⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

⁴³⁵ Stainforth, 2002, p. 21.

⁴³⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

⁴³⁷ MS 29540, NLS, f. 15.

the mountain. In her essay ‘Vision and Quest in Somhairle MacGill-Eain’s “An Cuillithionn”’ she discusses the interplay between metaphor and metonymy in relation to the poet and the Cuillin.⁴³⁸ She returns to the motif that she sees as being of central importance within Gaelic culture – the relationship of the king and, by extension, the people, with the land as symbolized through a marriage union. The land is the personification of sovereignty as a ‘goddess with geotectonic powers’.⁴³⁹ The fertility of the land was ensured when the rightful and legitimate leader was at one with the land and sovereignty was bestowed on him. This idea has important implications in MacLean’s poem for not only does it insinuate that the land is female, it also suggests that the land is affected by human action – there is an inference that if power is placed on the wrong person(s) the suffering of the masses is mirrored in the suffering of the land as MacLean shows when the Cuillin is felt to shake with the cries of the tortured.

While I agree with Ní Annracháin’s reading I suspect that there is another level present within the poem regarding MacLean’s relationship with the mountain. MacLean is physically experiencing the Cuillin – his hands are grasping the ‘body’ of the mountain to assist his climb and his body becomes strangely synchronized to the shape of the Cuillin. He is forming an understanding with something outside of himself – the ‘(m)Other’:

Anns an dìreadh bhon choire,
cas air sgeilpe, miar air oireig,
uchd ri ulbhaig, bial ri sgorraig,⁴⁴⁰

The poet could indeed be attempting to gain a metaphorical form of sexual union with the mountain. It is even possible to read the imagery in the following lines as a masculine ‘conquering’ of the feminine:

gaoirdean rìghinn treun gun tilleadh
gu ruig fàire do chóigimh bidein
far am brist air ceann na spàirne
muir mhór chiar nan tonn gàbro,⁴⁴¹

However, I doubt that MacLean is one of those climbers who believe that a mountain can be conquered. He describes the mountain in sublime terms and this in itself is proof that he views the mountain as being above mere mortals. When I consider the language that is

⁴³⁸ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 8.

⁴³⁹ Ní Annracháin, 1997, p. 10.

⁴⁴⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

⁴⁴¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

employed in this section I perceive a real sense of yearning from the poet. This may be the yearning felt by a lover but it may just as easily signify the craving for the closeness experienced by a child for a mother:

a chraosan maireann an caol eagan,
a spùtadh sìorruidh anns gach turraid,
a bhàrcadh biothbhuan anns gach sgurra.⁴⁴²

From the language used in the quotation above there are connotations of a primal relationship between the poet and the mountain that places the Cuillin in the role of the great terrible Mother – an initiator as well as the giver and taker of life. The descriptions of water suggest a womb-like environment and the yawning mouth of chasms implies the earth as womb and perhaps even the birth canal. It may be that the poet's initial feeling of the mountain as lover has given way to a far deeper and intense meaning of the mountain as (m)Other. Abjection is at the heart of this experience.

In his essay 'Geometry and Abjection' Victor Burgin suggests that the sublime, in its Romantic eighteenth-century incarnation with its emphasis on 'caverns and chasms, falls and oceans', is a simple displacement, a 'metaphorical transference of affect from the woman's body.'⁴⁴³ The Romantic poets such as Shelley, Byron and Wordsworth are actually experiencing a loss of identity when they muse on the sublime nature of the landscape. The link between the feminine and the landscape is taken up by poets like MacLean in the present as they explore their sense of self in relation to the outside world of nature. In *Powers of Horror* Kristeva states that 'Fear of the archaic mother proves essentially to be a fear of her generative power.'⁴⁴⁴ In this context Burgin puts forward the idea that the woman's body reminds men of their own mortality.⁴⁴⁵ Thus, the emotions expressed by poets when they see gaping caverns and folds of rock, are actually the same emotions experienced when they are faced with the prospect of birth and death. In other words, bound up in man's fear and awe of the female is his fear of nature itself. In *Revolution of Poetic Language*⁴⁴⁶ Kristeva points to the possibility that the patriarchal, symbolic order marginalizes the feminine, which it views

⁴⁴² MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

⁴⁴³ Victor Burgin, 'Geometry and Abjection' in *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Works of Julia Kristeva*, ed. by John Fletcher and Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1990) pp. 104-123 (p. 117).

⁴⁴⁴ Kristeva, 1982, p. 77.

⁴⁴⁵ Burgin, 1990, p. 116.

⁴⁴⁶ See Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984)

as being linked to the semiotic, imaginary stage. It is reasonable to take this idea a stage further and view the biological, procreative body as being inextricably linked to the pre-Oedipal mother – the first object of abjection that the subject must keep beyond its borders if it is to survive and retain its identity. This is not to imply that ‘woman’ is abject. Instead, Burgin means that what has the power to be abject is ‘woman as privileged signifier of that which men both fear and desire: the extinction of identity itself.’⁴⁴⁷ In *Male Fantasies*, Klaus Theweleit puts himself in this position of fear and shows that abjection is never far from the surface:

If that stream reaches me, touches me, spills over me, then I will dissolve, sink, explode with nausea, disintegrate in fear, turn horrified into slime that will suffocate me, a pulp that will swallow me like quicksand. I’ll be in a state where everything is the same, inextricably mixed together.⁴⁴⁸

The woman as procreative body represents the point where identity is challenged, where mother and infant mix in pre-Oedipal bliss and meaning becomes endangered. The subject and object are not clearly defined and the boundaries become blurred. Of course, abjection is a two-sided coin – with the fear of collapsing boundaries come also feelings of desire. Both types of emotion are exhibited by MacLean in Part II of ‘An Cuilithionn’ when he describes his meeting with the mountain:

A Chuilithinn chreagaich an uamhais,
tha thusa mar rium dh’ aindeoin fuathais.
A’ cheud la dhìrich mi do mhùr dubh
shaoil leam am Breitheanas bhith tùirling;
a’ cheud la phòg mi do ghruaidh
b’ e choimeas fiamh an Tuile Ruaidh;
a’ cheud la phòg mi do bhial
dh’ fhosgail Iutharn a dhà ghiall;
a’ chiad la laigh mi air d’uchd-sa
ar leam gum faca mi a luchdadh
aig na speuran troma, falbhaidh
gu crith sgriosail na talmhainn.⁴⁴⁹

I have quoted this part of the poem in full because it illustrates my point so clearly. The poet desires the mountain, he wants to be close to it and to experience some sort of union with it and yet it also seems terrible and shocking to him. He wants to metaphorically kiss its mouth and when he does this ‘hell’ opens up before him. Other imagery that is evoked when he tries

⁴⁴⁷ Burgin, 1990, p. 117.

⁴⁴⁸ Burgin, 1990, p. 117.

⁴⁴⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 76.

to grasp a sense of closeness with the Cuillin is the Great Flood and heavy, rain-filled skies. Water and chasms give the reader the idea that the poet is experiencing a watery, womb-like landscape – he desires this return to the mother and the semiotic space, where the symbolic word is swallowed up and he has no identity, and yet this very prospect is what terrifies him the most. The passage above shows how a person may feel an unconscious desire to return to the womb and yet this yearning can never be fully realised. The subject is forever separated from the maternal entity but this does not stop abjection from coming into play. This yearning for what was once linked to the subject becomes almost an erotization of abjection.⁴⁵⁰ The apocalyptic images that are described at the beginning of Part II in relation to the poet's meeting with the mountain are perhaps fitting because the fact that boundaries have been crossed and that the abject is near is both a violent and passionate experience for the ego. Kristeva describes abjection as 'a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth.'⁴⁵¹ It is clear that the Cuillin and the environment surrounding it is mirroring the effect that the nearness of the maternal 'chora' and abjection is having on MacLean's sense of self. The landscape of Skye functions as the (m)Other, and by extension, MacLean's own Gaelic tradition, which is so closely bound up with place-names and memories, also functions as a maternal 'chora' for the poet. MacLean's use of older Gaelic material is interesting, especially in relation his quest for identity. By using older poems in such an obvious way in 'An Cuilithionn', MacLean is strengthening his Gaelic identity and his continuous relationship with the past in his role as poet while at the same time altering parts to fit his own modern sensibilities and political viewpoint. Thus, it can be viewed that his tradition is part of him and yet he is able to develop his own identity in relation to it also.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵⁰ Kristeva, 1982, p. 12.

⁴⁵¹ Kristeva, 1982, p. 9

⁴⁵² There are a number of 'calques' in 'An Cuilithionn'. Among the most obvious is a reference to 'Oran do MhicLeòid Dhùn Bheagain' by An Clàrsair Dall: 'Chaidh a' chuibhle mun cuairt/ Ghrad thionndaidh gu fuachd am blàths/ Gum faca mi uair/ Dùn ratha nan cuach 'n seo thràigh,/ Far 'm biodh tathaich nan duan,/ Iomadh mathas gun chruas, gun chàs:/ Dh' fhalbh an latha sin uainn,/ 'S tha na taighean gu fuarraidh fàs.' Matheson, 1970, p. 58. There are echoes of An Clàrsair Dall's poem in Part VI of 'An Cuilithionn': 'Théid a' chuibhle mun cuairt/ is tionndaidh gu buaidh an càs./ Nàile, chì mise bhuan/ onfhadh a' chuain gun tràigh;/ chì mi bàrcadh nan stuadh/ agus bàirlinn le gruaim mhóir àird;/ bidh an latha sin buan/ 's bidh na beanntan fo nuallan àigh.' MacLean, 1999, p. 116. An Clàrsair Dall goes on to lament the loss of the good old days: 'Chaidh Mac-alla as an Dùn/ An am sgarachdainn dùinn ri 'r triath,' Matheson, 1970, p. 58. MacLean shows his own feelings about the hardship of mankind with very similar language: 'Cha d' fhàg Clio an Dùn/ dh'aindeoin truaighe 's cion lùiths bho chian.' MacLean, 1999, pp. 116-118. Also in Part VI of 'An Cuilithionn' there is a reference to John MacCodrum's poem, 'Smeòrach Chlann Dòmhnail'. MacCodrum's mavis is the bard of nature: 'Smeòrach mis'

There may be another reason for the visions and apocalyptic occurrences that happen within the landscape when MacLean comes into direct contact with the Cuillin. In Part I, after the initial description of MacLean's physical experience of Sgurr nan Gillean, the whole of his perception seems to shift – spirits and ghosts are seen and the plight of mankind begins to emerge. In Part II MacLean describes in yet more detail his relationship to the mountain and directly after this description MacLean hears the voices of Pàdraig Mór and Maol Donn – both reach out from the past to touch him in the present:

Air Sgurr Dubh an Dà Bheinn
 thàinig guth gu m' chluais a' seinn,
 Pàdraig Mór 's a cheól a' caoineadh
 uile chlann a' chinne-daonna.
 Agus feasgar air a' Ghàrsbheinn
 bha ceòl eile ann a thàinig,
 Maol Donn agus ùrlar sàth-ghaoil
 a' bristeadh cridhe nam fonn àlainn.⁴⁵³

Although the visions in Part II that come after the poet's close experience with the Cuillin are less terrifying than the ones in Part I, what is clear in both instances is that when there is a 'meeting' with the mountain, the poet becomes more open to visions and insights and finds himself within a landscape that, although similar to the one that he inhabits in his normal life, is actually quite different. The Cuillin is MacLean's mountain of vision through which the supernatural is accessed. When he climbs Sgurr nan Gillean he leaves the linear,

air ùrlar Phabuill/ Crùbadh ann an dùsal cadail,' *The Songs of John MacCodrum, Bard to Sir James of Sleat*, ed. by William Matheson (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1938) p. 44, whereas Clio's words in Part VI show that she cannot rest like the mavis because she is the witness of the wrongs of mankind: 'Smeòrach mis' air Urlar Phabail,/ ach cha d' fhuair mi móran cadail.' MacLean, 1999, p. 116. MacLean's roll call of heroes in Part VI (pp. 110-114) is reminiscent of 'Òran nam Fineachan' by Iain Dubh mac 'ic Ailein, see Black, 2001, pp. 38-46. Also, in Part III of MacLean's poem there are two stanzas, which evoke 'Là Inbhir Lòchaidh' by Iain Lom. Compare MacLean's 'Dhìrich mi moch maduinn Dòmhnach/ gu mullaichean nam baideal ceòthar,/ chunnaic mi na Bùirdeasach an òrdugh,/ Dòmhnallaich gun bhuidh, is Leòdaich...Dìreadh a mach glùn Choir-Each/ dh'aithnich mi bhur sùrd 's bhur dreach:/ ged bha mo dhùthaich 'na fàsaich,/ cha b' éirig air a' chùis an tràth ud.' MacLean, 1999, p. 88, to Iain Lom's 'Dhìrich mi moch madainn Dòmhnach/ Gu bràigh caisteil Inbhir Lòchaidh;/ Chunnaic mi 'n t-arm dol an òrdugh,/ 'S bha buaidh a' bhlàir le Clann Dòmhnail...Dìreadh a mach glùn Chùil Eachaidh,/ Dh' aithnich mi oirbh surd bhur tapaidh;/ Ged bha mo dhùthaich 'na lasair,/ 'S éirig air a' chùis mar thachair.' *Orain Iain Luim: Songs of John MacDonald, Bard of Keppoch*. ed. by Annie M. MacKenzie (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1964) p. 12. MacLean's revamping of Iain Lom's work may be in relation to a subversion of the stance which Iain Lom took regarding the role of the poet. See MacLean, 1985, p. 12.

⁴⁵³ MacLean, 1999, p. 78.

chronological time of the outside world and accesses a very different space. By approaching the (m)Other in the shape of the Cuillin he is leaving symbolic time as regulated by the Law of the Father (see 3.3.1, p. 78 above). The boundaries have collapsed and there are no rules of time – there is only eternal space with the voice of past, present and future mingling and merging. Kristeva studies this state of being in her essay, ‘Women’s Time’. She points out that James Joyce was aware of the same sort of ideas discussed in her essay when he uses the phrase ‘Father’s time, mother’s species’.⁴⁵⁴ Traditionally the feminine is associated with space and the generating and forming of the human species, while the masculine is understood in relation to time and history. Kristeva describes the maternal body as a matrix and calls it the ‘unnameable’. It is repetitive and eternal and is thus linked to the semiotic stage, which is before the development of the self, signs, speech and the concept of time.⁴⁵⁵ Kristeva has been criticised by feminists who believe that by associating the idea of the feminine with the semiotic it gives rise to the sexist view that women babble.⁴⁵⁶ However, Kristeva is not banishing women to a space outside history although it is easy to see why her theories are sometimes misconstrued in this way. The semiotic is not inherently feminine but, when the semiotic is so closely related to the mother’s body, it can be difficult to separate them and not get pulled into discourse relating to questions about ‘feminine’ modes of writing and ‘female’ essence.⁴⁵⁷

Kristeva does not imply that women are ‘outside’ history, that they cannot function in the symbolic order or that they have a language outwith ‘normal’ discourse. Terry Eagleton emphasizes that the semiotic is not an alternative to the symbolic order since, according to Lacanian theory, if a person could not enter the symbolic order, they would become psychotic because they would not be able to symbolize their experience through language. Eagleton encapsulates Kristeva’s point perfectly when he writes:

One might see the semiotic as a kind of internal limit or borderline of the symbolic order; and in this sense the ‘feminine’ could equally be seen as existing on such a border. For the feminine is at once constructed within the symbolic order, like any gender, and yet is

⁴⁵⁴ Julia Kristeva, ‘Women’s Time’, in *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*, ed. by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993) pp. 443-462 (p. 445).

⁴⁵⁵ Kristeva, 1993, p. 445.

⁴⁵⁶ Eagleton, 1996, p. 164.

⁴⁵⁷ Eagleton, 1996, p. 164.

relegated to its margins, judged inferior to masculine power... On this view, the feminine – which is made of being and discourse not necessarily identical with women – signifies a force within society which opposes it ... The political correlative of Kristeva's own theories – of a semiotic force which disrupts all stable meanings and institutions – would appear to be some kind of anarchism.⁴⁵⁸

It is important to realise that men as well as women have access to the semiotic state as indeed James Joyce proves when he employs a style of writing related to the semiotic. It is seen as a 'feminine' and 'semiotic' style simply because it breaks the rules set out by a conservative, 'masculine' literary establishment. Kristeva writes that 'women's time' can be both cyclical and monumental – it is cyclical because it is bound up with the eternal recurrence of biological rhythm and thus this regularity 'is experienced as extra subjective time, cosmic time...' It is monumental because it is all-encompassing and infinite – there is no escape from it.⁴⁵⁹ When MacLean strives for closeness with the Cuillin his perception shifts from the masculine to the feminine and cyclical/ monumental temporality takes over from linear time. Thus, archaic, mythical memory takes hold and visions, as well as a much wider perspective of history, is possible essentially because, for a while at least, the poet has put one foot outside linear time and returned to the (m)Other.

4.1.3 The Symbol of the Morass in 'An Cuilithionn' – The Abjection of the Primal

While it is clear that the Cuillin is the dominant symbol within the landscape described in 'An Cuilithionn' there is another symbol, which is the antithesis of the mountain in appearance and underlying meaning, and deserves detailed study. The morass features prominently in Part II, III, IV, and V of the poem. Christopher Whyte points out that in Part II the bog under the Cuillin, which is described as being filled with ghosts, is a real place within the Skye landscape – the marsh of Maraulin at the top of Glen Brittle, north of the Cuillin.⁴⁶⁰ However, in Part III the marsh becomes less of a specific local landmark of Skye and takes on more of a metaphorical function within the poem. Just as the Cuillin becomes the universal mountain, thus this local morass spreads across the whole world, taking in Europe, America and Asia. MacLean describes this as a frightening prospect – the bog stands for greed and evil and it destroys everything in its way. Although at the end of Part II the flood

⁴⁵⁸ Eagleton, 1996, p. 165.

⁴⁵⁹ Kristeva, 1993, p. 445.

⁴⁶⁰ Whyte, 2002, p. 239.

ebbs and morning still comes, most of the images presented by the poet are depressing and, in some parts, terrifying. MacLean provides very little hope that the morass will be overcome. In Part IV MacLean begins to look at the effect that the morass has had on his own soul. This part of the poem is far more personal and MacLean describes how the mud and filth has seeped into his spirit and his heart – it has penetrated his body and he cannot escape from its hold. However, by Part V the tone of the poem has changed and MacLean provides the reader with a glimmer of hope. Although he has moved away from the subject of his own self he sees a vision of the Skye Stallion, which could be linked to the energy that MacLean feels is rising within himself and others who are sympathetic to the fight against fascism. It finds its power and springs to life, galloping from peak to peak of the Cuillin and overcoming the morass. As the Stallion's power grows the pull of the morass recedes. By Part VII the Cuillin rises beyond both the sea and the bog – there seems to be an affirmation of hope in the Cuillin's strength and survival over hardship.

In his article, 'Out from Skye to the World: Literature, History and the Poet', Douglas Sealy makes the following observation:

The spiritual affinity between MacLean and Baudelaire is most obvious in their use of the symbol of the abyss. Baudelaire's 'gouffre' becomes, in MacLean's Gaelic, "an slochd sgreadaidh", the loathsome pit that swallows up man's aspirations; "'na shlocan sgreadach fuaraidh gun chur", the chill, rocky, untiled pit that drains the generosity of youth; and "critich an uamhais", the frightful quagmire from which the soul can hardly escape.⁴⁶¹

A standard reading of 'An Cuilithionn' would usually view the 'quagmire from which the soul can hardly escape' as being in relation to the evil and wrong that has been committed against the weak and oppressed throughout history. The image of the filthy, stinking, greedy morass as a symbol of capitalism, fascism and all that MacLean views as evil within the world is a fair reading of the meaning of the symbol and one with which I fully agree. However, in this section I intend to study the morass in relation to the abjection that I have already highlighted as being present in Part I of 'An Cuilithionn' as another level of meaning. Although a great amount of the poem is making social and political statements there is another level of meaning present within the symbol of the bog that is connected to the human subject's unconscious processes. I will present a different perspective of the morass, for while

⁴⁶¹ Douglas Sealy, 'Out from Skye to the World: Literature, History and the Poet' in *Sorley MacLean: Critical Essays* ed. by Raymond J. Ross and Joy Hendry (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) pp. 53-79 (p. 54).

MacLean's political commitment is overt throughout the poem and certainly cannot be doubted, I would like to explore the inner, latent drives of the poet in 'An Cuilithionn'.

The bog lives up to its definition in 'An Cuilithionn'. A bog is wet, spongy ground consisting of decomposing vegetation that eventually turns into peat. MacLean describes the whole of Scotland as a bog in Part II:

Seo latha eile air na sléibh-tean
is Alba gheal 'na brochan bréine.⁴⁶²

He effectively portrays the morass of filth as a thick soupy mixture that takes up everything, swallowing it and making it part of the bog itself:

Tha 'n t-sùil-chruthaich domhainn saoi-bhir
a' slugadh fearann nan neo-aoibhneach,
brat na saille, dubh is duainidh,
a' mùchadh nam mìltean thruaghan.⁴⁶³

We are given the impression that the bog is swallowing history and all the evidence of the wrongs committed against humanity. The bog is deep and rich with all that it has swallowed and many layers of history have become muddied in its grasp. In Seamus Heaney's 'Bogland' the bog is a symbol of the situation in Ireland – memory and feeling run deep and the bog preserves Ireland's history and yet removes it from sight. Although he describes the ground as 'kind, black butter',⁴⁶⁴ which is a far cry from MacLean's malignant morass, the idea of lack of definition in 'Bogland' is similar to the situation in 'An Cuilithionn':

Melting and opening underfoot,
Missing its last definition
By millions of years
...
The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage.
The wet centre is bottomless.⁴⁶⁵

Heaney describes artefacts that have been recovered from his Irish bog – 'the Great Irish Elk' and bog butter. He takes the idea of what the bog retains much further in his poems dealing with sacrificial 'bog people', which I will return to in more detail later in this section. What Heaney is suggesting is that the bog is ancient, primal and capable of preserving things from the past. This idea can be aided with archaeological evidence. Barry Cunliffe writes that the

⁴⁶² MacLean, 1999, p. 82.

⁴⁶³ MacLean, 1999, p. 84.

⁴⁶⁴ Seamus Heaney, *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998) p. 41.

⁴⁶⁵ Heaney, 1998, pp. 41-42.

ancient Celts showed reverence for the chthonic deities by depositing hoards and single objects in bogs and other watery places. They viewed these places as sacred.⁴⁶⁶ Deposits at places such as La Tène in Switzerland are continental examples of this practice but votive offerings of this nature have been discovered closer to home in Scotland. Gouges, hammers, socketed axes, spearheads, amber beads and glass have been recovered from a peatbog at Adabrock on Lewis and swords and spearheads were dredged from Duddingston Loch in Edinburgh in 1778.⁴⁶⁷ These were most likely offerings to the gods because the people who left objects in bogs had no hope of recovering them – once dropped into the watery environment they were lost to humans and the fact that many of these artefacts were ritually broken before being deposited also made them unfit for human use thus they were only of use to the otherworld. These watery bogs were viewed as sacred places because they lacked the definition of hard ground and were felt to be gateways to the otherworld due to the uncertainty of their limits. The offerings may have been made to thank the gods or appease them but either way the sense that these areas are the domain of gods and not humans adds to the connotations of fear and uncertainty.

MacLean does not emphasize the primal nature of bogland in as obvious a way as Heaney but he does make subtle reference to its supernatural nuances in Part II of ‘An Cuilithionn’:

Tha solus-biorach air a’ mhòintich
 ’s chan eil 'na mhanadh an sòlas
 ach casgairt, gort is mort is dòlas,
 bristeadh cridhe ’s bàs an dòchais.⁴⁶⁸

‘Solus-biorach’ is the will o’ the wisp – the pale flame caused by the spontaneous combustion of methane given off by decomposing matter on marshy ground. In folklore the will o’ the wisp has become a supernatural entity that is elusive and misleading and which foretells doom. The idea of an omen or a prophecy is further strengthened with the use of ‘manadh’ in the same stanza. MacLean connects the will-o-the-wisp to the morass, making it seem as if it is a product or the manifestation of the evil that the morass symbolises. The idea of an uncanny presence lurking on the border between two worlds is a powerful notion. He continues the connotations of the supernatural in the next stanza:

Och, a mhòinteach Mararabhlainn,

⁴⁶⁶ Barry Cunliffe, *The Ancient Celts* (London: Penguin Books, 1997) p. 199.

⁴⁶⁷ Ian Armit, *Celtic Scotland* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd/ Historic Scotland, 1997) p. 92.

⁴⁶⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 82.

's ann dhutsa bu dual na taibhsean,
 oir chuala tusa an cràdh-ghal
 is Coire na Creiche 'na àraich
 agus chuala tu an caoineadh
 is Minginis a' call a daoine.⁴⁶⁹

The wet, spongy ground seems to be soaking up the pain suffered by the people throughout history – this is one of the few instances in which MacLean does not portray the morass as evil but rather describes it as something which cannot help but take on the pain of the people. The morass has inherited the ghosts of the people because everything returns to the earth. However, on another level, the ghosts become the primal ancestors of new generations and take on the character of gods. In more ancient times perhaps the people who left votive offerings in watery places were communing with their god-like ancestors who had already returned to the earth and thus a sense of community existed between the worlds. In 'An Cuilithionn' MacLean is carrying on this tradition of the connection between people, history and the land on which this history takes place. For MacLean, the morass is primarily a symbol with history and great depth since it swallows the past. If this reading is considered the morass is far more than simply the symbol of the evil of fascism and capitalism.

In 'An Cuilithionn' Part III MacLean makes it clear that anything of beauty is sucked into the bog and changed beyond recognition:

Tha ioma craobh dhosrach snodhaidh
 a' fàs anns a' bhoglaich choimhich
 is ioma eun treun-sgiathach àlainn
 a sheas orra mas deach a bhàthadh;
 ach an uair a thig an laomadh
 sluigear flùr is eun is craobhan.⁴⁷⁰

Although he is using this as an example of the evil nature of the morass, in reality all that is taking place is the decomposition process when living things become part of the earth. MacLean exhibits fear and distrust of this process – part of this could be a stylistic feature in order to link the symbol of the bog to the evil within the world. However, the distrust of this watery, muddy environment goes beyond this and can be linked to abjection. The bog is doubly abject. Firstly, its lack of definition and its decomposing matter brings to mind Kristeva's discussion of the abjection of corpses and cesspools, which are linked to death:

If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not

⁴⁶⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 84.

⁴⁷⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 86.

and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes,
is a border that has encroached upon everything.

...

It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one
does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness
and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.⁴⁷¹

It is this fear of encroaching borders that makes the morass seem greedy – ‘Siod oirbh, a bhoglaichean sanntach’⁴⁷² – and which, by extension, makes it abject to MacLean. It is moving all the time and is not adhering to its uncertain borders. The evils of the past that it represents are coming too close to the present and there is danger of contamination. The ‘ancestors’ drowned in the bog are also too close and it is this invasion that upsets the balance of life and death. For this reason, it is understandable that MacLean links the abject feature of the bog, which is a fear of being smothered – ‘Sasainn agus an Fhraing còmhla/ air am mùchadh san aon òtraich’⁴⁷³ – with the abject traits of mankind such as greed and treachery:

Siod oirbh, a bhoglaichean sanntach,
tha sibh moiteil garg ceannsail;
sibh a dh’fhaodas, tha sibh dligheach
air seirbhis eanchainne gun chridhe.⁴⁷⁴

However, the bog is also abject in ‘An Cuilithionn’ in a second way. The primal, regressive aspect of the water, mud and other unknown matter within the bog suggests a womb-like atmosphere and, of course, there is nothing more abject for a fully functioning adult in the ‘symbolic’ world than the possibility of return to the maternal, semiotic phase where everything becomes one with the ‘mother’, symbolised in this part of the poem as the morass. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, in their introduction to *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, make the following observation:

In Kristeva’s schema, the abject is always ambiguous: desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous; and, moreover, the process is never simply one of repudiation: ‘It is something rejected from which one does not part.’⁴⁷⁵

MacLean exhibits the same feeling of helplessness in relation to the powerful pull of the bog. In Part IV he writes:

⁴⁷¹ Kristeva, 1982, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁷² MacLean, 1999, p. 86.

⁴⁷³ MacLean, 1999, p. 82.

⁴⁷⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 86.

⁴⁷⁵ *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, ed. by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) p. 7.

'S fhada 's cas o àird an aonaich
 sìos gu grunn na boglaich craosach,
 ach mar is airde théid an dìreadh
 's ann is doimhne a chì neach
 troimh an ruaimle, troimh a' chàthar,
 troimh chridhe boglaich a' bhàthaidh.⁴⁷⁶

It is appropriate that the bog is described using the word 'craosaich', which gives the impression of a wide open, gluttonous mouth – most tellingly, one of the other definitions that Edward Dwelly gives for this word is 'gross sensuality'.⁴⁷⁷ Like the description of the other landscape symbol, the mountain, MacLean is partly repulsed but partly drawn towards the morass. To continue this theme in Part V, when the gelding transforms into the great Stallion, MacLean remarks that 'chail na boglaichean am mealladh'.⁴⁷⁸ The word 'mealladh' can mean deceiving, beguiling, and alluring and the fact that the bog has been given these properties adds to the idea that it is being linked to a feminine identity that is tempting the poet.

4.1.4 The Morass as Maternal/ Semiotic Domain – MacLean, Heaney and the Other

MacLean is displaying primal feelings of fear and repulsion towards the bog - in other words, the abjection of the maternal element is at work. Seamus Heaney is another poet who deals with the symbol of the bog in relation to a primal maternal force. Heaney uses the image of the sacrificial victims of ancient pagan rites to come to terms with the modern Irish Troubles and the 'sacrificial victims' that were being offered in modern times. Although this element of the poetry is quite different to MacLean's theme, on a basic level the way the bog is described is noticeably similar. In 'The Tollund Man' Heaney writes about a 'bog man' that has been discovered in the peat:

Bridegroom to the goddess,
 ...
 She tightened her torc on him
 And opened her fen
 Those dark juices working
 Him to a saint's kept body,⁴⁷⁹

'Kinship' is perhaps one of the best examples of Heaney's 'bog poems' – he describes the

⁴⁷⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 92.

⁴⁷⁷ Edward Dwelly, *Dwelly's Illustrated Gaelic to English Dictionary* (Glasgow: Gairm Publications, 1994) p. 266.

⁴⁷⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 98.

⁴⁷⁹ Heaney, 1998, p. 64.

soft ground in sensuous terms as an ‘insatiable bride’ and is blatant in his description of this land as a goddess whose womb-like earth holds history in its grasp:

Quagmire, swampland, morass:
 the slime kingdoms,
 domains of the cold-blooded,
 of mud pads and dirtied eggs.
 ...
 Earth-pantry, bone vault,
 sun-bank, embalmer
 of votive goods
 and sabred fugitives.⁴⁸⁰

There is the sense that humans sink back to the ground - the Tollund man is evidence of history swallowed by the bog. Thus, the land keeps history within its borders and this is reiterated in ‘Kinship’ when Heaney writes:

Our mother ground
 is sour with the blood
 of her faithful
 ...
 they lie gargling
 in her sacred heart.⁴⁸¹

There are marked similarities between the imagery of Heaney’s bog poems and MacLean’s bog in ‘An Cuilithionn’ although Heaney appears to be more at ease with the ‘jouissance’ aspect of the maternal land whereas MacLean is more likely to emphasise the repulsion of the abject. If this is the case it could be inferred that MacLean is trying to escape from his feared regression to the maternal/ semiotic land and his main concern is to achieve the ‘heights’ of intellect thus leaving corporeality behind. However, the difference between body, mind and spirit in ‘An Cuilithionn’ is a complex issue and will require more discussion in following chapters. It can be no coincidence that Heaney and MacLean’s poetic styles also vary and this may be an added factor in the difference of their treatment of the bog – Heaney’s earthiness and love of sensual language relating to the soil may be the main reason for his apparent ease with the abject. However, individual styles do not take away from the fact that both poets describe the bog as a primal, womb-like environment with connotations of darkness, slime and water. These words are all linked to the abjection of the mother and the fear of returning to a state in which there is no definition between the self and the (m)Other. Price and Shildrick suggest that the female body is often equated with abjection because it has the

⁴⁸⁰ Heaney, 1998, p. 121.

⁴⁸¹ Heaney, 1998, p. 125.

propensity to defy containment and cross borders:

The very fact that women are able in general to menstruate, to develop another body unseen within their own, to give birth and to lactate is enough to suggest a potentially dangerous volatility that marks the female body as out of control, beyond, and set against the force of reason. In contrast to the apparent ordered self-containment of the male body...the female body demands attention and invites regulation.⁴⁸²

The bog in ‘An Cuilithionn’ is described in the same terms as the maternal body and, as Price and Shildrick point out, the maternal body ‘is capable of generating deep ontological anxiety.’⁴⁸³ Their description of the female body as a source of abjection could equally be a description of MacLean’s bog in ‘An Cuilithionn’:

As the devalued process of reproduction makes clear, the body has a propensity to leak, to overflow the proper distinctions between self and other, to contaminate and engulf.⁴⁸⁴

MacLean, who as the male voice of ‘An Cuilithionn’, views the feminine as ‘other’, will thus by extension see the bog, something that he fears as encroaching on his own borders, as the ‘other’ also. The deep-seated, unconscious fear of the ‘other’ runs through ‘An Cuilithionn’ and is manifested in the basic opposition between land and water. The bog is abject because it is really water masquerading as land and for this reason it is the most frightening of prospects.

The idea of chaos being connected to the morass can be taken a stage further if it is looked at in relation to the Stallion. In Part III MacLean writes about the Stallion which has been gelded. It is a symbol of the impotency of the people who have suffered oppression and a loss of power and confidence:

An cuala sibh an sgeul grànda
 gun do spothadh an t-Aigeach?
 Bha ioma bùirdeasach is bàillidh
 ga chumail fodha anns a' chàthar.
 (...)
 Dh'fhàgadh e air an t-sitig.
 Thugadh bhuainn ar n-each iomraidh,
 bàthaidh na boglaichean an t-iomlan.⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸² Price and Shildrick, 1999, p. 3.

⁴⁸³ Price and Shildrick, 1999, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁴ Price and Shildrick, 1999, p. 3.

⁴⁸⁵ MacLean, 1999, pp. 86-88.

The gelding is a fitting symbol of the modern wasteland and the Stallion that later transforms from the gelding is a symbol of the regeneration of the land. One of the most important lyrical peaks of ‘An Cuilithionn’ comes in Part V when the gelding regains power and is transformed into the Stallion. He is seen to conquer what is abject:

nì thu sìnteg thar na mòintich;
 chan eil thu tuilleadh air an òtraich;
 chan eil thu nis ’nad thruaghan gearrain;
 chaill na boglaichean am mealladh.⁴⁸⁶

From a psychological perspective it is possible that the Stallion is a symbol of identity for MacLean. If MacLean is metonymically linked to the Stallion he may be asserting his sense of self in relation to the maternal semiotic domain of the watery morass.

The search for the self is an important theme throughout ‘An Cuilithionn’, especially when abjection is considered in relation to identity. So far I have shown how the poet reacts to the aspects of the landscape such as the mountain and the morass. He meets and almost merges with them and is thus often in danger of losing his sense of self and becoming part of a semiotic/ maternal entity. The mountain opens its gaping mouth and the morass almost crosses his physical boundaries to a point where he cannot separate himself from it – it is this that makes the bog abject:

Cus dhen bhoglaich na mo spiorad,
 cus dhen mhòintich na mo chridhe,
 cus dhen ruaimle na mo bhuadhan:
 ghabh mo mhisneachd an tuar glas.⁴⁸⁷

MacLean is struggling for a sense of his own individuality – the bog is abject because it takes away individuality and the heroism that comes from a sense of one’s own strength and worth. The bog encroaches on borders and everything becomes one with it. When no acts of heroism and courage can rise above the quagmire the evil that it represents triumphs. In ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean is trying to reach the unattainable heights of the Cuillin – the mountain is a symbol of hope that heroism will succeed but the poem could also be read figuratively as MacLean’s struggle for attainment of the Symbolic phase. As I have already discussed, in Lacanian and Kristevan theory the subject must break from the semiotic stage and only then can identity and a sense of individuality be reached within the Symbolic stage or Law of the Father.

⁴⁸⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 98.

⁴⁸⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 94.

4.2 Jungian Journeys from Ego-Consciousness to the Self

So far in this chapter I have studied MacLean's struggle for identity in relationship to the morass using Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. However, this particular theory, while extremely useful in aiding an understanding of the poet's emergence and separation from the 'other' does not describe the whole journey which is undertaken in 'An Cuilithionn'. Like Freud and Lacan, Kristeva looks specifically at the early stages of the journey of the self and uses the past in her descriptions of compulsions and neurosis, undertaking what has been described as 'archaeology of the mind'.⁴⁸⁸ MacLean's journey continues away from the morass and it is this aspect of the poem which deserves more attention in relation to the emergence of a sense of identity. In order for this topic to be explored more thoroughly I will employ Jungian theory to the symbols in 'An Cuilithionn', focussing specifically on the process of individuation – the movement towards wholeness whereby the conscious and unconscious parts of the personality are integrated (see 3.3.2, p. 82 above). I have already discussed individuation in my chapter on methodology but it is important to reiterate that it is a process and does not remain static. Individuation is not completed (unless death is counted as an ultimate goal) and thus it remains as an ideal attainment.⁴⁸⁹ It should also be remembered that I will be using Jungian theory in relation to a piece of literature and therefore the whole process may not be entirely apparent since a poet composes a poem in a specific stage in his life and very few texts represent the completed process for this reason. Laurence Coupe cites Dante's *Divine Comedy* as an exception to this rule with the poet descending into hell and, after meeting demons including Satan himself, he is being guided by Beatrice upwards to heaven where he is able to see his place within the cosmos and attains an understanding of his self.⁴⁹⁰ Jung viewed the journey of the ego to self as being circular and, because this journey is in pursuit of wholeness it is often symbolised by a mandala – the Sanskrit word for 'magic circle' said by Jung to express the totality radiating from a centre.⁴⁹¹ The journey, as shown by the example of the *Divine Comedy*, involves a descent into darkness in which the ego, i.e. the conscious part of a person, meets his shadow self and then an ascent into the light of the self is attempted, often with the help of the anima/animus. It is

⁴⁸⁸ See Coupe's comparisons of Jung and Freud in relation to this statement. Coupe, 1997, p. 140.

⁴⁸⁹ Andrew Samuels, *Jung and the Post-Jungians* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) p. 102.

⁴⁹⁰ Coupe, 1997, p. 142.

⁴⁹¹ Samuels, 1985, p. 96.

there that the conscious and unconscious integrate and ‘total personality’ and wholeness is achieved.⁴⁹² Evidently parallels can be drawn between this model and Frazer’s paradigm of the dying and reviving god⁴⁹³ which I will explore more fully in the next chapters. However, Jung’s model is involved exclusively with psychological integration and for the remainder of this chapter I will explore the archetypes of the ego, shadow, anima and self in relation to MacLean’s symbols in ‘An Cuilithionn’.

4.2.1 Ego, Shadow and Anima in the Skye Landscape

The post-Jungian analyst, E. Neumann, views the first psychological goal in the hero/ego’s journey to the self as the attempt at separation from the mother and the maternal environment.⁴⁹⁴ This is in keeping with Kristeva’s theory of abjection as I have already discussed (see 3.3.3, p. 84 above). Jung speaks of ‘a deadly longing for the abyss, a longing to drown in one’s own source, to be sucked down to the realm of the mothers’.⁴⁹⁵ It can be surmised that Jung has in mind something bigger than the personal mother when he writes about ‘the gateway to the unconscious, the Eternal Feminine’ where the ‘divine child slumbers, patiently waiting his conscious realisation.’⁴⁹⁶ The sheer size and scope of this concept is fulfilled in ‘An Cuilithionn’ when it is taken into consideration that MacLean’s experiences with a ‘maternal landscape’ – the ‘uterine environment’ of the morass - centres on the substantial and sublime local landscape of Skye. According to Jungian theory, in order for there to be a properly stated boundary between the maternal environment and the ego, often there occurs an overstressing of the masculine side of the personality – conflict and struggle takes place and leads to a temporary loss of depth of the soul while specifically masculine traits are emphasised.⁴⁹⁷ In MacLean’s case his sense of political activism in the poem comes into its own as he traverses the mountain and extricates himself from the bog. His strong political principles can only be expressed once he has successfully separated from the maternal landscape and gained the perspective of the heights of the mountain. However,

⁴⁹² Coupe, 1997, p. 141.

⁴⁹³ Coupe, 1997, p. 141.

⁴⁹⁴ Samuels, 1985, p. 71.

⁴⁹⁵ *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Vol. V, ed. by H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler, and W. McGuire (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1953-91) para 553. Henceforth to be referred to as *CW*.

⁴⁹⁶ *CW*, Vol. V, para 508.

⁴⁹⁷ Samuels, 1985, p. 71.

the sense of the female does not completely disappear. A more feminine side of the ego must be reached in order for a balance to take place. In ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean’s sense of balance is brought about by the female voices which infiltrate the poem, namely the girl from Gesto and the muse of history, Clio. The girl from Gesto recounts how she has been forced from her own land of Skye into slavery in a foreign land. It is interesting to note that MacLean emphasise the female-centeredness in this part of the poem by writing that the girl misses her mother’s house:

Saothair, acras, fannachd, tàmailt,
 b’ iadsan a’ chuibrionn a bha ’n dàn dhomh;
 agus a chaidh cha ruig mi fàire
 om faic mi Loch Harport ’s taigh mo mhàthar
 far an robh cridhealas is gàire
 aig luaidhean ri linn mo chàirdean;
 agus chan fhaic mi an Cuilithionn cràcach
 ag éirigh thar Minginis mo shàth-ghaoil.⁴⁹⁸

In the stanzas which follow the girl from Gesto begins a praise poem to the landscape in traditional metre, thus landscape and traditional song are inextricably bound together. MacLean uses this girl’s voice to access his own land, history and culture and he is able to give the respect and sense of importance that he feels for the Gaelic old songs.⁴⁹⁹ Clio takes up where the voice of the Gesto girl ends and her voice takes on the spirit of the landscape, recounting the hardships, oppression and heroism which have taken place throughout space and time. There are actually many Clio figures because MacLean begins locally with ‘ ’S mise Chlio mhór Sgitheanach’⁵⁰⁰ before moving out to encompass Scotland, Ireland, Europe and the rest of the world, giving the impression that each Clio is a witness to the events in her own locality. The voice of Clio describes pain and suffering but there is also a sense of pride in the heroism that has been witnessed:

’S mise Clio an t-saoghail:
 tha mo shiubhal sìorruidh, aognaidh,
 ach gu tric ’s ann dh’ éireas an lasair
 a dh’fhadas eanchainn, cridhe ’s anam.⁵⁰¹

In the case of the girl from Gesto section, it is perhaps surprising that a male poet is so drawn to a tradition that was exclusively the domain of women in the past such as waulking songs

⁴⁹⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 106.

⁴⁹⁹ See Chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of this topic. Also see Sorley MacLean, ‘Old Songs and New Poetry’ in Gillies, 1985, pp. 106-119.

⁵⁰⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 110.

⁵⁰¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 116.

and in relation to the Clio section he has no difficulty in expressing the strength of a woman's voice. However, it is not just MacLean who accesses this Gaelic tradition of women's passion and strength – poets such as Derick Thomson also lay a great amount of emphasis on the Gaelic women's tradition of song and oral culture⁵⁰² and while this could also be interpreted as a move towards the maternal landscape of the mother tongue and the mother country I am proposing that what is seen here, specifically in the case of MacLean's Gesto girl is a balancing of opposites between the male and female aspects of his cultural psyche. Part VI, in which the voices of the Gesto girl and Clio emerge most strongly, is a highly female-centred part of 'An Cuilithionn' and it is no coincidence that this section comes straight after Part V which is filled with very masculine symbols of action and movement, particularly in the form of the Skye Stallion.

The Stallion in Part V comes into his own strength after a period of complete powerlessness earlier in the poem. In Part III MacLean laments the situation of the Stallion:

An cuala sibh an sgeula grànda
 gun do spothadh an t-Aigeach?
 Bha ioma bùirdeasach is bàillidh
 ga chumail fodha anns a' chàthar.
 Sgaradh a chlachan agus eanchainn:
 rinneadh droch dhìol air an ainmhidh;⁵⁰³

By Part V the Stallion has risen up and opposed the forces which are causing the suffering of the people:

Siod ort fhéin, Aigich lùthmhoir,
 prannaidh tu bùirdeasachd nam fùidsean,
 nì thu sìnteag thar na mòintich;⁵⁰⁴

A standard interpretation of the Stallion may be that he is the force of Socialism which has risen up to defend the masses and, while this is true, a Jungian interpretation would take the symbol onto another level and view it as a part of MacLean's own consciousness. MacLean begins the poem in a state of helplessness and hopelessness, looking on at the macabre scene of the oppressors celebrating their actions on the slopes of the Cuillin. He can be likened to the Stallion in his powerless state but by Part V MacLean's purpose is clearer and his sense

⁵⁰² In particular see Derick Thomson's 'Clann-Nighean an Sgadain' and 'An Tobar', although it should also be noted that a great many of Thomson's poems about Lewis deal with separation from the 'mother' in the shape of the land itself. Black, 1999, pp. 452, 454-457.

⁵⁰³ MacLean, 1999, p. 86.

⁵⁰⁴ MacLean, 1999, pp. 96-98.

of action is central to the poem. It is highly likely that MacLean's own feelings are being channelled through the symbol of the Stallion – the Stallion is a symbol of Socialism but it is furthermore a symbol of MacLean's belief in the power of Socialism and what this means for the world. Thus, the Stallion also represents the drives of the poet. The Stallion is MacLean's ego-consciousness - when it is described as stamping into the ground the landowners and capitalists it is clear that this is what MacLean would also like to do.

Andrew Samuels describes Jung's view of the ego in the following terms:

From the earliest times the symbol of ego-consciousness with which man has been most able to identify is the hero. The larger-than-life nature of the hero stands for man's aspirations, and his various struggles and conflicts aptly express the uneven course of human existence. The hero's journey as expressed in myth and legend 'signifies a renewal of the light and hence a rebirth of consciousness from the darkness'.⁵⁰⁵

Throughout 'An Cuilithionn' MacLean's struggles centre on the need to rid the world of capitalism and Fascism and his whole identity is defined by this aspiration. His political journey towards the light is symbolised in the dawn of a new age, symbolised by the red flag of Communism rising above the land:

Chuala mi gum facas bristeadh
agus clisgeadh air an fhàire,
gum facas ròs dearg ùrail
thar saoghal brùite màbte;⁵⁰⁶

If his political journey, in Jungian terms, defines his emergence and journey towards the self and wholeness, then it is understandable that his 'shadow' is the landowners and other villains of 'An Cuilithionn'. According to Jung the shadow signifies what each man fears and despises in himself. It can also stretch further than the personal and can sum up the fears of a particular culture at a particular time.⁵⁰⁷ In the first few parts of 'An Cuilithionn' MacLean witnesses the ghosts of the past rising up and dancing on the Cuillin:

air gach baideal dhen Chuilithionn
bha riochd fear-spùillidh a' tulgadh.
Gobhlach air Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh
bha triùir de thriathan Dhun-Bheagain,
agus air Fiacail a' Bhàisteir

⁵⁰⁵ Samuels, 1985, p. 66.

⁵⁰⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

⁵⁰⁷ Samuels, 1985, p. 65.

a liuthad de mhorairean Shléite.⁵⁰⁸

The ghosts of the landowners, factors and capitalists represent the shadow for MacLean. It could be that MacLean shows real fear of these ghosts because he is afraid that the attitudes of these men will permeate everyone. He certainly sees capitalism as a disease which spreads in the form of the morass:

Cus dhen bhoglaich na mo spiorad,
cus dhen mhòintich na mo chridhe,⁵⁰⁹

He is expressing the fear that capitalism will overtake the world and his self to the extent that the whole situation becomes hopeless. It is clear that the shadow has already affected the woman he loves who he imagines was walking with him on the mountain:

Bha deuchainn na mo spiorad aognaidh
nuair a smaoinich mi gum b' e t' aodann
a chunnaic mi sa mhòintich bhaoith ud.⁵¹⁰

On another occasion, in Part VII he imagines that this woman turns on him and becomes a vulture:

agus air ball bha cruth na biatach
air a bòidhche ghil chianail
Agus 's ann tholl i mo chliathaich.⁵¹¹

The theme broached here may be one of political betrayal by his love also glimpsed in the *Dàin do Eimhir* (see 6.1.3.1, p. 187 below), but from a Jungian perspective she is also a representation of the negative anima or the shadow. For MacLean, the landowners represent the dark side of man due to their actions. Jung stresses that the shadow should not necessarily be regarded as negative because it provides a moral aspect – personal and communal relationships can be unblocked and integration with the shadow leads to a greater sense of completion.⁵¹² Jung writes:

Assimilating gives a man body...the animal sphere of instinct, as well
as the primitive or archaic psyche, emerges into the zone of consciousness.⁵¹³

MacLean finds the traits of the landowners and capitalists who dance on the Cuillin morally reprehensible and thus the shadow signifies through these ghosts what is incompatible with

⁵⁰⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 70.

⁵⁰⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 94.

⁵¹⁰ MacLean, 1999, pp. 90-92.

⁵¹¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

⁵¹² Samuels, 1985, p. 65.

⁵¹³ CW, Vol XVI, para 452.

his chosen ideal. The fact that the visions of these ghosts take place on the Cuillin is no accident – in the poem the Cuillin becomes the seat of MacLean’s unconscious and thus the landscape, with the old songs, familiar place-names and traditions as well as the morass and the capitalists, embody his fears and also his desires. However, once MacLean faces up to what upsets him most in his unconscious self his journey is able to continue from the descent into darkness to the ascent into light. The ghosts of the past can be bypassed and a hopeful new future can be envisioned.

4.2.2 Self on the Summit of the Cuillin

In Jung’s mind the self symbolised the meaning and purpose in life. In other words, the self holds the potential for a person to become whole, with every part of the conscious and unconscious being at one and balanced. It is interesting in the context of ‘An Cuilithionn’ that Jung saw Christ as a symbol of the self, in the sense that Christ reconciles the divine/human and spirit/body pairs of opposites as well as transcending the opposites of life and death. He symbolises the paradigm of individuation in that he lives out completely his nature and destiny.⁵¹⁴ It is this idea of a reconciliation of opposites in ‘An Cuilithionn’ that must now be addressed if MacLean’s understanding of his own identity is to be grasped. MacLean also employs Christ as a symbol in his poem. In some of these instances Christ is seen on the Cuillin:

Chunnacas Crìosda dol mun cuairt
air a’ mhullach lom fhuar.⁵¹⁵

There are also references to Christ’s crucifixion in relation to other martyrs:

Chrochadh Crìosda air crois-ceusaidh
agus Spartacus le cheudan;
bha ioma biatach dé am Breatainn
a rinn an obair oillteil sgreadaidh,
agus cheusadh ioma Crìosda
an uiridh agus am bliadhna.⁵¹⁶

In ‘An Cuilithionn’ Christ can be viewed as a symbol of totality in the centre of the poet’s self since his actions as a sacrificial hero are greater than anything that man can imagine within himself. Christ’s role in ‘An Cuilithionn’ is as the heroic martyr and sacrificial victim and this symbol will be explored more thoroughly in other chapters. However, it is relevant in

⁵¹⁴ Samuels, 1985, p. 98.

⁵¹⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 124.

⁵¹⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

a study of MacLean's self that the symbol of Christ is also connected to the mountain. If the Cuillin is the seat of MacLean's unconscious self then the visions which unfold on and around the mountain will also be a part of his self. The mountain is the one place where all of these disparate parts of the poet can meet, which explains why two very different figures can exist together on its heights:

Chunnacas gach flùr a dh'fhàsas,
 eadhon an taobh gonte cràiteach;
 ach ann an aon chan fhacas riamh ann
 tuigse Lenin is taobh dearg Chrìosda;
 chan fhaicear an dithis còmhla
 a dh'aindeoin farsaingeachd na mòintich;
 chan fhaicear ann an aon àit' iad
 ach air mullach lom nam àrd bheann.⁵¹⁷

Jung underlines this point when he writes:

The self, though on one hand simple, is on the other hand an extremely composite thing, a 'conglomerate soul', to use the Indian expression.⁵¹⁸

The self is indeed a difficult entity to grasp and the symbolic experiences connected to the self can be 'powerful, awesome, enriching, mysterious – but not capable of being described exactly'.⁵¹⁹ In other words, they are sublime which is also the word which perhaps best describes the Skye landscape and the Cuillin in MacLean's mind. Thus the landscape and the self become almost one and the same for the poet because his local landscape is where his true nature can be best located.

Further evidence for the mountain being MacLean's location of the self is the fact that all the elements of his self are located on the summit. Samuels' working definition for Jung's self is the 'potential for integration of the total personality.'⁵²⁰ He goes on to state that this includes 'all psychological and mental processes, physiology and biology, all positive and negative, realised and unrealised potentials, and the spiritual dimension.'⁵²¹ This may be why MacLean describes the heart, brain and spirit as well as important emotions such as courage as being present on the mountain-top:

⁵¹⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 90.

⁵¹⁸ CW, Vol IX, para 634.

⁵¹⁹ Samuels, 1985, p. 97.

⁵²⁰ Samuels, 1985, p. 91.

⁵²¹ Samuels, 1985, p. 91.

Ròs dubh a' Chuilithinn ghuinich
 dearg le fuil cridhe 'n duine;
 ròs ciar na h-eanchainne glaise
 dearg le tuar na fala braise;
 ròs geal tuigse nan saoi
 dearg leis an fhuil gun chlaoidh;
 ròs dearg misneachd nan laoch
 thar mullach shléibhteann 'na chaoir.⁵²²

The idea of wholeness on the mountain is reinforced with the use of the rose, which symbolises completion and wholeness in many cultures and is a symbol that will be looked at in closer detail in Chapter 4. I am in no way suggesting that by the end of 'An Cuilithionn' MacLean has reached a perfect state in which the potential of his self has been fully realised and his ego is absorbed into the unconscious. In fact, Jung himself warns against such a process, stating that:

The great psychic danger which is always connected with individuation ...lies in the identification of ego-consciousness with self. This produces an inflation which threatens consciousness with dissolution.⁵²³

MacLean's awareness of the wider world, his strong opinions on politics and his overall concern for the state of mankind is balanced with his spiritual yearnings and thus there is no rejection of ego-consciousness. Rather, by the end of the poem MacLean is learning to balance the two aspects of his personality and what he glimpses on the mountain at the end of Part VII is the potential of his self and a sense of hope for the future. In Jungian terms 'am falbhan', which he sees on the mountain just in front of him, is a part of himself and a sighting of the 'ideal'. There is a strong sense of longing in the last few stanzas of the poem but the poet never overtly explains what the object of this longing is:

Có seo, có seo oidhche chinne?
 chan eil ach samhla an spioraid,
 anam leis fhéin a' falbh air sléibhteann,
 ag iargain a' Chuilithinn 's e 'g éirigh.⁵²⁴

The longing for the Cuillin that is rising may be, on one level, a political symbol of the hope of Communism, but in the context of MacLean's own identity in 'An Cuilithionn' it is a longing for his complete self.⁵²⁵ This process is ongoing and cannot be fully grasped but by the end of the poem MacLean has gone some way to defining a part of the journey towards an

⁵²² MacLean, 1999, p. 126.

⁵²³ Quoted from Robert A. Segal, *Explaining and Interpreting Religion: Essays on the Issue* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992) p. 23.

⁵²⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 128-130.

⁵²⁵ See also *Dàin do Eimhir XXVIII*, 'Na Samhlaidhean', which also deals with the same themes of eternity and longing. Whyte, 2002, p. 83.

understanding of his identity, even if the process cannot be completed. The fact that ‘am falbhan’ is seen on the mountain reinforces the idea of the Cuillin as MacLean’s seat of the unconscious – it is both his personal unconscious and the collective unconscious since it is a storehouse of personal memories and sensations for MacLean as well as being an important symbol in the history and oral tradition of MacLean’s own people.

Conclusion

MacLean’s emerging self in ‘An Cuilithionn’ can begin to be detected when the symbols of the poem are examined from a psychological perspective. Abjection can be detected throughout ‘An Cuilithionn’ and is present within the different symbols that MacLean employs. The two most obvious examples of this sense of abjection can be found in the Cuillin and the bog. Both are chief symbols of the landscape in the poem and they interact with the different themes of ‘An Cuilithionn’ such as the oppression of the masses at the hands of corrupt power. However, it should be remembered that although the mountain and the bog can apply to the concerns inherent in the wider world, because they are devised by MacLean to act as symbols within his own poem they will nevertheless primarily function as manifestations of his own personal drives and desires. Julia Kristeva writes about the psychological process experienced by the subject whereby there is a progression from the semiotic stage of the mother to a stage that could be described as the attainment of the ‘symbolic’ – language takes over and the subject develops a sense of self separate from the ‘other’. What can be seen in ‘An Cuilithionn’ is an unconscious performance of this process using the symbols of the landscape. The movement between the stages is not painless and can cause upheaval, which is the reason why the processes may be repeated and acted out within literature. With this disruption comes the abject with its feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. The boundaries are ambiguous and are constantly moving just as MacLean’s borders are porous in relation to the mountain and bog in the poem. It is appropriate that the symbols that he employs are taken from his native landscape since these images are as primal as the psychological processes that are enacted and that underlie the main themes of the poem.

From a Jungian perspective MacLean’s journey can be viewed through the paradigm of individuation in which the mountain is a central focal point and the visions such as the Stallion which emerge from its environs are parts of MacLean’s own self. While the ghostly

dance of the landowners and the morass represent MacLean's fears of the encroachment of capitalism into his own personal and collective cultural space, the anima is symbolised by the Gesto girl and Clio who represent what he sees as important within his own history and tradition. The journey from the depths of the bog to the heights of the mountain is a process in which totality is a hope and a vision of the future, as 'am falbhan' at the end of the poem signifies.

Throughout this chapter I have employed Kristeva and Jung's theories to MacLean's symbols in order to further the understanding of MacLean's purpose in 'An Cuilithionn'. Kristeva's theory of abjection sits very well with the poem but it is only part of the overall picture which unfolds as the poem progresses. Jung's individuation theory broadens the idea of the poet's journey in 'An Cuilithionn'. By advocating a both...and approach to theory instead of an either...or approach a fuller insight into the potential of MacLean's vision is possible and new questions involving the theme of identity begin to emerge.

Chapter 5

The Beginning of the Journey: Patterns of Movement on the Mountain

Introduction

I established in Chapter 4 that a sense of identity emerges in ‘An Cuilithionn’ and continues to advance as the poem unfolds. I believe that the development of MacLean’s ideas and political beliefs are linked to the sense of movement and progression in the poem. His fear of the stagnation symbolised in the morass means that he is striving for the manifestation of ideals which will not be drowned along with the bourgeois and the masses in the floods described in the early parts of ‘An Cuilithionn’. MacLean’s poem is not just a catalogue of the wrongs of mankind and, unlike T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, it is not simply a comment on the state of Europe and the sterility of the Western world with little obvious indication of where people must go next. ‘An Cuilithionn’ contains MacLean’s vision of hope for mankind and can also be viewed as his manifesto for a ‘new Europe’. I want to demonstrate that movement is of utmost importance in the poem; it enables MacLean to convey in an urgent way his feeling of the need to move from the old established order to a new social perspective in his own time. He would have been aware that the creation of a Communist state would not necessarily be smooth and that the make-up of the country would alter drastically and this realisation is also mirrored by the symbols in his poem.

I have already dealt with MacLean’s psychological journey in relation to the primal morass and the mountain. I now intend to take this idea a stage further and study how symbols such as the sea-monster and the Skye Stallion act as principal vehicles for movement and progression in ‘An Cuilithionn’. I will begin by assessing the importance of movement in Part I and II in relation to the link between climber and the Cuillin itself. I will then turn my attention to the sea-monster that emerges from the waters and coils itself around the mountain. Although this image is only mentioned briefly in Part VII, I will bring its significance to the forefront of my study, highlighting its place in MacLean’s poetic landscape and contemplating the importance that this same symbol held for Hugh MacDiarmid and the possible influence that this had on MacLean. However, ‘An Cuilithionn’ is not the only poem in which MacLean explores the symbol of the serpent - the serpent is

also mentioned in ‘Coilltean Ratharsair’. Therefore it would be overly simplistic to see the sea-serpent as just a reference to MacDiarmid. Therefore the symbol will be studied at length, in order to gain a thorough understanding of its complexity. I will then focus on the Stallion in ‘An Cuilithionn’, indicating its connection to the sea-monster and assessing its overall contribution to movement in the poem. By studying the literary and political aspects of these symbols it is hoped that an overall sense of movement will begin to emerge in relation to the pattern of narrative and history in the poem.

5.1 Patterns of Movement on the Mountain in Part I and II

In Part I and II of ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean establishes the Cuillin, and in particular, specific peaks, such as Sgurr nan Gillean and Sgurr Alasdair, as important symbols in the poem. He does this by describing the different peaks from the perspective of a climber. In Part I and II many peaks of the Cuillin ridge are mentioned. However, although the mountain peaks continue to be of importance in other parts of the poem it is in the first two parts that the symbol of the mountain is given its most firm grounding in the setting of Skye and the history of MacLean’s people. MacLean stands on certain peaks of the Cuillin as he describes his visions and movement is inherent in these parts of the poem. When maps of the Cuillin are studied the poet’s ‘physical’ progress on the Cuillin can be traced (see Fig. 4, p. 141 below).

At the beginning of Part I MacLean describes climbing Sgurr nan Gillean:

Gun tigeadh dhomhsa thar gach àite
bhith air do shlineannan àrda
a’ strì ri do sgòrnan creagach sàr-ghlas
mo ghleac ri d’ uchd cruaidh sgorrach bàrcach.⁵²⁶

MacLean favours it – ‘ach Sgurra nan Gillean sgùrr as fheàrr dhiubh,⁵²⁷ – and he devotes a considerable section of Part I to the description of his relationship with this peak. Sgurr nan Gillean, at 3,167ft, is located in the north area of the Cuillin ridge.⁵²⁸ Later in Part I MacLean is on Sgurr a’ Ghreadaidh (3,192ft), which is south west of Sgurr nan Gillean and looks down on Coire ’n Uaigneis:⁵²⁹

⁵²⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

⁵²⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

⁵²⁸ Stainforth, 2002, p. 158.

⁵²⁹ Stainforth, 2002, pp. 156-157.

Latha dhomh air Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh,
na mo sheasamh air an roinn aird eagaich,
ag amharc sìos air Coire 'n Uaigneis
troimh bharcadh a' cheò mun cuairt orm,⁵³⁰

He looks back up to the north in the direction of Sgurr nan Gillean, where he was previously standing and he views the beauty of the island:

Thionndaidh mi, 's tuath 's an iarthuath
bha Minginis 'na bòidhche shianta
agus Bràcadal uaine;
Diùirinis is Tròndairnis bhuaipe.⁵³¹

On another evening MacLean is standing on Sgurr na Banachdaich, which means he has 'travelled' only a short distance from Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh. His previous position on Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh is still in his mind as well as in his physical vision since from Sgurr na Banachdaich he witnesses a vision of the lords of Dunvegan on that same peak:

Feasgar dhomh air Sgurra na Banachdaich
dh'èirich samhraidhean san anamoch;
air gach baideal dhen Chuilithionn
bha riochd fear-spùillidh a' tulgadh.
Gobhlach air Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh
bha trìuir de thriathan Dhun-Bheagain,⁵³²

By the end of Part I MacLean appears to have continued east to Sgurr Alasdair, the highest point of the Cuillin at 3,257ft.⁵³³

Air Sgurr Alasdair ri lannir
is àilleachd airgid na gealach,
lean an glaodh ud ri mo chlaistneachd,
dhrùidh e air smior mo neairt-sa,⁵³⁴

It seems that MacLean has tried to escape the visions witnessed at Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh and Sgurr na Banachdaich, by moving away to a higher point but the visions still haunt him.

In Part II the atmosphere changes – MacLean is on Sgurr Dubh an Dà Bheinn, which means that he has made an arc eastwards from his previous positions and the experiences on Sgurr Dubh are softer than the sights he has looked on so far, with the famous MacCrimmon piper

⁵³⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 68.

⁵³¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 68.

⁵³² MacLean, 1999, p. 70.

⁵³³ Stainforth, 2002, p. 158.

⁵³⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 74.

providing music:

Air Sgurr Dubh an Dà Bheinn
thàinig guth gu m' chluais a' seinn,
Pàdraig Mòr 's a cheòl a' caoineadh
uile chlann a' chinne-daonna.⁵³⁵

He is on slightly lower ground at 3,078ft and this descent continues as he makes his way around the Cuillin ridge to Garsven (2,935ft):⁵³⁶

Agus feasgar air a' Ghàrsbheinn
bha ceòl eile ann a thàinig,
Maol Donn agus ùrlar sàth-ghaoil
a' bristeadh cridhe nam fonn àlainn.⁵³⁷

MacLean has thus shown a presence on some of the most famous peaks of the Cuillin throughout the poem. By the end of Part II it is possible to view a suggestive circle of movement since MacLean figuratively returns to where he started at Sgurr na Gillean when he states:

Nach éireadh Sgurra dubh nan Gillean
's gach sgurr eile agus binnean
mar chùirn-chuimhne air bhur cruadal
agus air gaisge mhóir an uamhais!⁵³⁸

MacLean's route on the Cuillin ridge shows that he had an underlying plan of the direction – both literally and metaphorically – that the poem would take.

⁵³⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 78.

⁵³⁶ Stainforth, 2002, p. 158.

⁵³⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 78.

⁵³⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 80.



Figure 4: Picture map of the Cuillin Ridge. Stainforth, 2002 pp. 156-157 with additions by the author.

MacLean's movement from peak to peak on the Cuillin suggests that his vision sweeps around the whole of Skye as far as his eye can see – no part of the island is missed out since, by standing on different peaks, he can see in every direction. The physical movement mirrors the underlying movement of his mind's eye since MacLean's vision also sweeps around the whole of the history of his island, taking in the battles of the clans, the emergence of the landowners and their corrupt ways, the plight of the oppressed crofters during the clearances and the Crofters' War as described by poets such as Màiri Mhór in her songs. 'An Cuilithionn' is firmly embedded in MacLean's world and his movement on the Cuillin reinforces this point. However, in the poem MacLean looks out beyond Skye and while he traverses the Cuillin, in his mind he is moving far beyond his local landscape to the wider world in which there are concerns, which resonate in the same way as the local circumstances with which MacLean is familiar. Later, in Part VI of the poem there is emphasis on the idea that figures from different periods of history can exist side by side since their experiences and concerns are much the same – the time and setting may change but the oppression and heroism remain the same. This suggestion is highly tentative but it is worth putting forward at this stage that by moving around the peaks of the Cuillin MacLean is strengthening the cycle

of history, which is inherent in the poem – actions within the local frame have significance on a wider scale. In later parts of the poem when MacLean looks further afield than Skye and even Scotland he is reinforcing what he first sets out in Part I and Part II. The remainder of this chapter will be concerned with two of the symbols which emerge later in the poem and which continue the themes of movement and patterns of history.

5.2 The Mountain Encircled: The Sea-Monster in ‘An Cuilithionn’

In Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’ there is a short section which describes a sea-monster coming out of the water and sitting on the summit of the Cuillin. It is coiled and then becomes straight as it reaches towards the heavens in a threatening manner:

Thogadh as a’ mhuir an uilebheist
 ’s chuireadh i air àird a’ Chuilithinn;
 bha i cearclach an àm ruagaidh
 a-mach á doimhne nan cuantan,
 ach a nise tha i dìreach
 a’ leum ri gaoith an aghaidh sìne;
 chunnacas an nathair a’ leumraich
 is aodann nèimh air a bheumadh.⁵³⁹

The motif of a sea serpent is not mentioned in any of the previous parts of ‘An Cuilithionn’ and even in Part VII the monster appears to stand alone with very little context in which its presence in the text could be explained. However, the whole of Part VII contains fleeting images that have apocalyptic overtones and it may be that the sea-serpent can be included in the same category as the visions of vultures and crucified heroes. After studying MacLean’s manuscripts of ‘An Cuilithionn’ in the National Library of Scotland I am certain that the image of the sea-monster has its origins in Hugh MacDiarmid’s long poem ‘To Circumjack Cencrastus or the Curly Snake’. In the manuscript of the translation of MacLean’s poem the snake is originally translated as being ‘curly’ (cearclach) and it is later changed to ‘coiled’,⁵⁴⁰ both in the manuscript and later in the published version. There is a footnote in the manuscript that states that the snake is a reference to ‘Cencrastus’.⁵⁴¹ Sorley MacLean had mentioned in one of his university notebooks in 1932 that:

For [MacDiarmid] at any rate I have a high admiration. I read over his poem
 “To Circumjack Cencrastus” and could not understand it. Today I have

⁵³⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

⁵⁴⁰ MS 29559, NLS, f. 98.

⁵⁴¹ MS 29559, NLS, f. 98.

begun to re-read it, and even identify glimmerings of the main conceptions, and beginning [sic] to appreciate its purpose...“To Circumjack Cencrastus” is primarily an allegory. It is metaphysical in its conception. It deals with the resurgence of life in Scotland to-day, with the poet’s hope of “Gaeldom regained”.⁵⁴²

From this evidence it can be stated that MacLean was conversant with MacDiarmid’s poem.⁵⁴³ Indeed, by the time he was composing ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean would have had even more time to ponder over the symbols of MacDiarmid that he had first encountered during his student days. MacLean placed a reference to the curly snake into his own poem for a specific reason. It may be that he wanted to play this reference down slightly, at least for his English readership who did not have Gaelic, hence the change in the translation from the more obvious ‘curly’ to ‘coiled’ and the removal of the footnote in the published version. In this chapter I intend to firstly explore the symbol of the snake as it appears in MacDiarmid’s poem and further expand on this symbol by looking at it within a wider historical and literary context. I will then look at the way MacLean uses the symbol in ‘An Cuilithionn’ and other poems and I will draw conclusions about MacLean’s thought processes from these findings.

5.2.1 The Curly Snake in Hugh MacDiarmid’s Poetry

To Circumjack Cencrastus or The Curly Snake was published in October 1930 but it had been many years in its conception and had been written by Hugh MacDiarmid during a time of considerable emotional upheaval in his private life. In September 1929 life was going well for MacDiarmid – he had started a new job in London on a magazine called *Vox* and London life gave him a chance to mix with other writers and discuss the intellectual ideas of the period. However, during the next year his marriage to his first wife, Peggy, began to disintegrate and then he lost his job when the magazine failed due to financial reasons.⁵⁴⁴ This turn of events may be one of the main reasons for *To Circumjack Cencrastus* being less of a success in the eyes of scholars and critics than his previous poems such as *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle*. In many parts of the poem the voice of C.M. Grieve is heard strongly as opposed to that of his literary pseudonym of MacDiarmid and he takes the opportunity to settle old scores with individuals and to push points that he personally felt strongly about⁵⁴⁵ –

⁵⁴² MS 29621, NLS, ff. 45-46.

⁵⁴³ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, pp. 179-294.

⁵⁴⁴ Bold, 1988, p. 243.

⁵⁴⁵ See Margery McCulloch, ‘The Undeservedly Broukit Bairn: Hugh MacDiarmid’s *To Circumjack Cencrastus*’, *Studies in Scottish Literature* 17 (1982) 165-85 (p. 179) for a more detailed discussion of this

the problems in his private life meant that his frame of mind would have been affected to a certain extent and this comes through in many of the more pessimistic passages in the poem.⁵⁴⁶ It was generally thought that *To Circumjack Cencrastus* lacked the coherence and focussed vision of *A Drunk Man*.⁵⁴⁷ It was certainly considerably longer than the earlier poem - at the time of writing *Cencrastus* MacDiarmid believed that it would overtake *A Drunk Man* in visionary scope. He wrote to his old schoolmaster, George Ogilvie in December 1926 that unlike his last poem this new work would not depend on 'the contrasts of realism and metaphysics, bestiality and beauty, humour and madness - but more on a plane of pure beauty and pure music.'⁵⁴⁸ However, MacDiarmid did not take into consideration in this statement that it is the tension of opposites in *A Drunk Man* that makes the poem so effective. In philosophical terms the opposites eventually achieve a union and with this union an artistic consummation takes place. Without these important contrasts *Cencrastus* could not have the same sort of power and resolution and without the presence of realism MacDiarmid had less substance with which to convey meanings in his poem. He had already effectively explored the sea-serpent image in earlier poems. In *Penny Wheep* he had composed a poem, 'Sea-Serpent', in which he envisions the serpent as a part of God's imagination, uncoiling like a spiral galaxy in 'the cantles o' space'.⁵⁴⁹ In this poem the serpent is a symbol of the creative principle and is not as rigid as the other beings which God created - it can be seen as a metaphor for the original and only plan of the universe which is now obscured within the mind of man.⁵⁵⁰ From the poet's perspective MacDiarmid shows how he longs to catch a

topic. She writes 'Although Professor Saurat's examples of unworthy objects of satirical attack were mischosen, he was right to detect petty satire in *Cencrastus*. There are a number of satirical passages...which deal with local contemporary figures and which add nothing at all to the poem in an artistic sense.'

⁵⁴⁶ Compton MacKenzie sums up the conditions under which MacDiarmid was working on the run up to the publication of *Cencrastus* by stating 'the fact of his being able to produce a book at all under the conditions in which he had to be working during the last two years makes me judge it too much as a miracle, too little as a work of art.' Cited by Kenneth Buthlay, 'The Scotched Snake' in *The Age of MacDiarmid: Essays on Hugh MacDiarmid and His Influence on Contemporary Scotland*, ed. by P.H. Scott and A.C. Davis (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1980) pp. 122-155 (p. 128). Margery McCulloch discusses the effect of the poet's personal life but she also takes into consideration the difficulty he endured within his own country as having a significant effect on how *Cencrastus* was composed - 'In *Cencrastus* we see the problem exacerbated by the conditions peculiar to the Scottish cultural situation and the effect these had on a poet struggling to find his own artistic identity, who yet found himself emotionally bound to the psyche of his indifferent country.' McCulloch, 1982, p. 179.

⁵⁴⁷ McCulloch, 1982, p. 165.

⁵⁴⁸ Nancy K. Gish, *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Man and His Work* (London: The MacMillan Press Ltd, 1984) p. 95.

⁵⁴⁹ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, pp. 48-51.

⁵⁵⁰ Roderick Watson, *MacDiarmid* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985) p. 45.

glimpse of the serpent coils and harness the creative energy:

I feel like a star on a starry night,
A'e note in a symphony,
And ken that the serpent is movin' still,
A movement that a' thing shares...⁵⁵¹

MacDiarmid visits the serpent symbol again in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* as the world serpent of the Yggdrasil myth (see below, p. 152) and the dragon at the foot of the cosmic tree. The branches of the tree drip honey and the bees feed on this:⁵⁵²

'Rootit on gressless peaks, whaur its erect
And jaggy leafs, austerely cauld and dumb,
Haud the slow scaly serpent in respect,
The Gothic thistle, whaur the insect's hum
Soon's fer aff, lifts abune the rock it scorns
Its rigid virtue for the Heavens to see.
The too'ering boulders gaird it. And the bee
Mak's honey frae the roses on its thorns.'⁵⁵³

Also in another part of the poem the serpent is mentioned in relation to MacDiarmid's adaptation of a poem by the Russian poet, Zinaida Hippus. The muse figure becomes a serpent, then an octopus, and finally transforms into the monstrous whale, Moby Dick. This coiling, serpentine monster becomes inseparable from the poet's soul:

And this deid thing, whale-white obscenity,
This horror that I writhe in – is my soul!⁵⁵⁴

MacDiarmid's symbol of the serpent and sea-monsters in this section of his poem contribute to what MacDiarmid called the 'psycho-somatic quandary'⁵⁵⁵ of human sexuality, and Kenneth Buthlay suggests that this theme is a modern version of the combination of opposites that is inherent in a great amount of literature throughout history.⁵⁵⁶ The effect of MacDiarmid's exploration of the snake and human sexuality has been described as being like

⁵⁵¹ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 50.

⁵⁵² Buthlay, 1982, p. 45.

⁵⁵³ Riach and Grieve, 1994, p. 36. In a later part of the poem there is another mention of the Tree of Life – 'Nae man can follow, and o' which/ He is himsel' a helpless pairt,/ Held in their tangle as he were/ A stick-nest in Yggdrasil!' (p. 74). Catherine Kerrigan also points out that the many-branched thistle, described as the 'hinge atween the deid and livin' is a symbol of unity that is connected to Yggdrasil. Catherine Kerrigan, *Whaur Extremes Meet: The Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid 1920-1934* (Edinburgh: The Mercat Press, 1983) p. 120.

⁵⁵⁴ Riach and Grieve, 1994, p. 38. The original lines by Hippus in her poem, 'Psyche', are 'And this dead thing, this loathsome black impurity/ this horror that I shrink from is my soul.' Kerrigan, 1983, p. 118. This could be described as a case of abjection akin to what I have already discussed in Chapter 3.

⁵⁵⁵ Buthlay, 1982, p. 46.

⁵⁵⁶ Buthlay, 1982, p. 46.

‘a childbirth in Church’ for Scotland in the 1920s.⁵⁵⁷ It is evident that MacDiarmid wanted to continue to explore such a potent symbol and thus the serpent as a ‘unifying symbol of the cosmic puzzle’⁵⁵⁸ - a puzzle which has at its heart opposites and how these opposites converge - is the main theme in *To Circumjack Cencrastus*.

The universal symbol of the curly snake with its tail in its mouth had local significance for MacDiarmid. In Langholm he remembered that during his childhood there was a serpentine path called ‘the Curly Snake’. He wrote that ‘It has always haunted my imagination and has probably constituted itself the ground-plan and pattern of my mind.’⁵⁵⁹ In an early poem, ‘The Curly Snake’, MacDiarmid conjures up this path in Langholm as the road to an erotic Eden on which he longs to travel with a woman called Minnie Punton whom he dedicates the poem to:

Sweetheart of mine, I hope that there will be
A Curly Snake for us in Paradise
(Oh! All true lovers go to Paradise)
That goes up darkly unexpected-wise,
Behind the gardens of felicity,⁵⁶⁰

Alan Bold takes this childhood image of MacDiarmid’s a stage further, comparing the way he felt alienated from Langholm to the way Adam and Eve were cast out of Paradise.⁵⁶¹ By the time the poet was composing *To Circumjack Cencrastus* he was beginning to move away from his use of Lallans and was turning his attention to Gaelic Scotland as the focus for Scotland’s cultural regeneration. He was continuing his quest for ‘Gaeldom regained’⁵⁶² by using an animal which occurs in Celtic art. He wrote to Helen Cruickshank that:

Cencrastus, the Curly Snake, is a Gaelic (or Scottish) version of the idea common to Indian and other mythologies that underlying creation there is a great snake – and that its movements form the pattern of history.⁵⁶³

MacDiarmid’s vision, in his political and social writing as well as his poetry, was not a purely Scottish one anymore – at this point he had taken up the idea that Ireland and Scotland must

⁵⁵⁷ This was a comment made by David Daiches in his introduction to *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* (1953). See Buthlay, 1982, p. 46.

⁵⁵⁸ Watson, 1985, p.44.

⁵⁵⁹ Alan Bold, *Hugh MacDiarmid: The Terrible Crystal* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1983) p. 130.

⁵⁶⁰ Bold, 1988, p. 70.

⁵⁶¹ Bold, 1983, p. 130.

⁵⁶² Bold, 1983, p. 128.

⁵⁶³ Gish, 1984, p. 101.

unite, at least culturally, if their full potential was to be realised.⁵⁶⁴ This is why the Gaelic language replaced his interest in Scots. In *Cencrastus* he began to look to the tradition bearers of the Gaelic past as examples for future writers. The ‘pantheon’ featured in the poem is composed of Gaelic poets from Scotland and Ireland – Aodhagán Ó Rathaille with his vision of ‘the Brightness O’ Brightness’, Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair with his ‘endless ecstasies’ and Mary MacLeod with ‘a new sang in her mooth’.⁵⁶⁵ It is interesting that in this section of *Cencrastus* MacDiarmid references Ó Rathaille and his poem ‘Gile na Gile’.⁵⁶⁶ MacDiarmid sees Scotland in the plaited hair of the Goddess/muse figure that the Irish poet had previously envisioned within a Jacobite context:

Aodhagán Ó Rathaille sang this sang
That I maun sing again;
For I’ve met the Brightness o’ Brightness
Like him in a lanely glen,
And seen the hair that’s plaited
Like the generations o’ men.⁵⁶⁷

Like the curly snake, the plaited hair with its connotations of the plaited design in Celtic art symbolises the pattern of human history, and Scottish/Gaelic history in particular.⁵⁶⁸ If this symbol is taken into the wider context of modernist literature it is actually extremely relevant to the way many poets were feeling at this point in the twentieth century. There was a tendency, perhaps mainly due to the loss of a generation of men during World War I, for poets to be acutely aware of those that had gone before them – T.S. Eliot’s ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’⁵⁶⁹ encapsulates the mood of the period by suggesting that poets and writers are directly influenced by the previous generation of writers and this is why individual poets are able to compose poetry that has a place in an old and ever-growing tradition – his view

⁵⁶⁴ See McCulloch, 1982, p. 176 for a more detailed look at MacDiarmid’s ‘Gaelic Idea’.

⁵⁶⁵ Bold, 1983, p. 128. Bold underlines the point that this ‘Gaelic pantheon’ collectively take the place that Dostoevsky occupied in *A Drunk Man* – the position of native Gaelic/ Scottish figures has been strengthened by the time of *Cencrastus*.

⁵⁶⁶ ‘Gile na Gile’ was a poem composed by Ó Rathaille in the ‘aisling’ tradition, which involves a vision by the poet in which he sees Ireland as symbolised by a beautiful maiden - usually she appears to be in some sort of trouble involving invaders (in ‘Gile na Gile’ the enemy is of a supernatural variety in the form of goblins). The girl is in trouble because Ireland is not free and she is calling for the Stuart redeemer to save Ireland. See *An Duanaire/ Poems of the Dispossessed: 1600-1900*, ed. by Seán Ó Tuama and Thomas Kinsella (Ireland: Dolman Press, 1994) pp. 152-155.

⁵⁶⁷ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 224.

⁵⁶⁸ Peter McCarey, *Hugh MacDiarmid and the Russians* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987) p. 116.

⁵⁶⁹ T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920) pp. 42-53.

was that major works of literature form an ‘ideal order’, occasionally redefined when a new masterpiece enters the sphere.⁵⁷⁰ Poets were aware of their roots and were exploring what tradition and past literary works meant to them, hence the literary references in Eliot’s *The Waste Land*⁵⁷¹ and James Joyce’s use of the same sort of device in a prose context in *Ulysses*.⁵⁷² Sorley MacLean exhibits the same tendency to look back at what has gone before in ‘An Cuilithionn’ where he uses traditional motifs such as the Mavis of Paible⁵⁷³ – references such as this would have been well understood by Gaelic readers conversant with the oral tradition and Gaelic literature. With the theme of the past, present and future in poetry and the idea that images can be reused in other poems, the snake with its tail in its mouth is an apt symbol to describe the turning of time and how events can recur. This theme in early twentieth century literature can be traced to the interest in the myth of birth, death and rebirth. James Frazer had brought these ideas to the attention of many writers including Eliot⁵⁷⁴ and so it is no wonder that MacDiarmid, who had a good grasp of intellectual ideas of the time, was exploring this theme in *To Circumjack Cencrastus* from a Celtic perspective.

MacDiarmid got the name of his serpent from Jamieson’s *Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, which describes Cencrastus as ‘a serpent of a greenish colour, having its speckled

⁵⁷⁰ See Eagleton, 1996, p. 34 for a retrospective and more critical view of Eliot’s theory.

⁵⁷¹ Eliot, 1974, pp. 51-76. Scholars have shown an awareness of the connections between Eliot’s *The Waste Land* and MacDiarmid’s *To Circumjack Cencrastus*. See Robert Crawford, ‘A Drunk Man Looks at *The Waste Land*’, *Scottish Literary Journal* 14.2 (1987), Alan Riach, ‘T.S. Eliot and Hugh MacDiarmid’, *The Literary Half-Yearly* 29.2 (1988) and Nancy Gish, ‘MacDiarmid Reading *The Waste Land*: The Politics of Quotation’ in *Hugh MacDiarmid: Man and Poet* ed. by Nancy K. Gish (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992) pp. 207-229. As far back as 1932 comparisons were being drawn between MacDiarmid and Eliot – Sorley MacLean explores some of the links between the poets in notes in his university notebook – ‘Like T.S. Eliot, [MacDiarmid] introduces many subtle references in other works to philosophical systems, only whereas Eliot relies mainly on the ‘Divine Comedies’, Elizabethan tragedy, the ‘Upanishads’ and ‘The Golden Bough’, [MacDiarmid] refers more to French, Russian and Gaelic sources...Like Eliot too, he introduces quotations into his verse, mainly from Gaelic sources, and appends explanatory notes to some of his references. Yet with all this, although Eliot was a pioneer in this sort of thing, [MacDiarmid’s] not a mere imitator of his work...’ See MS 29621, NLS, f. 47. It is entirely possible that MacDiarmid’s interest in French, Russian and Gaelic sources was a deliberate move towards a new ‘ideal order’. He was interested in Modernist writers as a way of exploring Scotland’s identity.

⁵⁷² James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Penguin Books, 1992).

⁵⁷³ MacLean, 1999, p. 116. See for example, John MacCodrum’s ‘Smedrach Chlann Dòmhnail’ which mention the Mavis of Paible. *The Songs of John MacCodrum, Bard to Sir James of Sleat*, ed. by William Matheson (Edinburgh: Scottish Texts Society, 1938) p. 44.

⁵⁷⁴ See Eliot, 1974, p. 70 – ‘To another work of anthropology I am indebted in general, one which has influenced our generation profoundly; I mean *The Golden Bough*.’ I have already expanded on this topic in my earlier chapter on methodology and the themes will be further expanded in Chapter 5.

belly covered with spots resembling millet seeds.⁵⁷⁵ Its source is ‘The Passage of the Pilgremer’ by John Burel in James Watson’s *A Choice Collection of Comic and Serious Songs* (Edinburgh 1706) in which Cencrastus is described as ‘a beist of filthy braith.’⁵⁷⁶ The other word in the title of the poem, ‘circumjack’, is very important to the overall purpose of the poem. ‘To Circumjack’ means to ‘fit’ or ‘to wrap oneself round’ – in this context MacDiarmid wants to define the ‘circle’. In other words he is attempting to catch the elusive serpent with his words and his poetry. If Cencrastus symbolises the creative energy underlying creation MacDiarmid is saying in his poem that it is the job of the artist to approach Cencrastus through his work. He writes that ‘the poet’s home is in the serpent’s mooth’⁵⁷⁷ but he is well aware of the difficulties of harnessing inspiration:

Poets in throes o’ composition whiles
 See you as fishermen in favourite pools
 May see a muckle fish they canna catch
 Clood-like beneath the glitterin’ fry they can.⁵⁷⁸

However, this is not the only meaning attributed to the serpent in the poem. Nancy Gish has pointed out that the problem with the symbol of Cencrastus is that there are conflicting meanings behind it – there are actually two very different serpents in the poem.⁵⁷⁹ The Cencrastus in the opening lines of the poem is described as being unlike the world:

There is nae movement in the warld like yours.
 You are as different frae a’thing else
 As water frae a book, fear frae the stars...
 (...)
 The simple explanations that you gi’e
 O’ age-lang mysteries are little liked
 Even by them wha best appreciate
 The soond advice you gied to Mither Eve,
 Or think they dae.⁵⁸⁰

Cencrastus is removed from the world and is distinguished from history. He is mentioned later in the poem in the same way:

Up frae the slime, that a’ but a hand fu’ o’ men

⁵⁷⁵ McCulloch, 1982, p. 183.

⁵⁷⁶ McCulloch, 1982, p. 183.

⁵⁷⁷ John Herdman, ‘Hugh MacDiarmid’s “To Circumjack Cencrastus”’ *Akros* vol 12, No’s 34-35 Aug (1977) 65-75 (p. 68).

⁵⁷⁸ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 181.

⁵⁷⁹ Gish, 1984, p. 102.

⁵⁸⁰ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 181.

Are grey wi' still. There's nae trace o't in you
Clear without sediment.⁵⁸¹

MacDiarmid's conception of this serpent agrees with the idea of the symbol that he describes in a letter to George Ogilvie:

It [the new poem] will be much bigger than the Drunk Man in every way. It is complementary to it really...But where the Drunk Man is in one sense a reaction from the 'Kailyard', Cencrastus transcends that altogether – the Scotsman gets rid of the thistle, 'the bur o' the world' – and his spirit at last inherits its proper sphere. Psychologically it represents the resolution of the sadism and masochism, the synthesis of the various sets of antitheses I was posing in the Drunk Man.⁵⁸²

The principles of his symbol described above in the letter and also in parts of the poem itself run counter to his description of Cencrastus in a letter to Helen Cruickshank in 1939:

In my poem that snake represents not only an attempt to glimpse the underlying pattern of human history but identifies it with the evolution of human thought.⁵⁸³

The serpent in this description is inextricably connected to the world. Near the end of *To Circumjack Cencrastus* this image described to Cruickshank surfaces and it is far more like the symbol of the thistle in which the elements of real and divine mingle together:⁵⁸⁴

Ah, double nature, distinct yet ane,
Like Life and Thocht. For Nature is
A moment and a product o' the Mind,
And no' a Mind that stands abune the warld
Or yet rins through it like a knotless threid
But coincides wi't, ane and diverse at aince;⁵⁸⁵

This serpent can be viewed as directly opposing the serpent that is introduced at the beginning of the poem. Nancy Gish views the main problem of *Cencrastus* as being connected to its central concept. She writes that MacDiarmid 'cannot choose between thought that has never been thought – which is one thing – and thought that cuts itself off from life, nature, sex 'brute maitter' – which may be a different thing.'⁵⁸⁶ She goes on to point out that:

Ironically, in calling for expanded consciousness, MacDiarmid limits

⁵⁸¹ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 285.

⁵⁸² Gish, 1984, p. 95.

⁵⁸³ Gish, 1984, p. 101.

⁵⁸⁴ Gish, 1984, p. 102.

⁵⁸⁵ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 283.

⁵⁸⁶ Gish, 1984, p. 103.

where it can go: it must develop in some coldly spiritual form. But while the poem verbally insists on this undefined higher plane of beauty, it gives way constantly before the intrusive 'brute maitter' it denies.⁵⁸⁷

The theme of oppositions is ever-present in MacDiarmid's work and so it is perhaps fitting that whether MacDiarmid meant for this or not, there is an inherent tension within *Cencrastus* himself. But whatever the serpent's overall purpose may be it can be stated that the image symbolises pure energy and will throughout the poem. Alan Bold sees this force or will as being masculine in nature in opposition to the female principle of the water surrounding the sea-monster – 'the feminine and masculine principles of creation are represented by the receptive ocean and the penetrating snake.'⁵⁸⁸ Nancy Gish thinks that the oppositions that can be found in *Cencrastus* do not work as well as they did in *A Drunk Man* because MacDiarmid is fighting against their presence in *Cencrastus* where once he was at ease with the divine and 'brute maitter'.⁵⁸⁹ It may be that MacDiarmid had different ideas regarding oppositions in his poetry after *A Drunk Man* – perhaps his vision had moved on and thus the symbolic oppositions were no longer relevant in the same context or had been completely superseded by the time he was composing *To Circumjack Cencrastus*.

5.2.2 The Ouroboros and Its Meaning In the Wider Context Of Myth and Religion

I have so far discussed MacDiarmid's own ideas regarding the curly snake. In the letter to Helen Cruickshank that I have quoted above he makes it clear that the serpent is a symbol that contains a storehouse of meaning due to its connection with mythology in India and other places. He describes it as representing 'the underlying pattern of human history' and as 'the principle of change and the main factor in the revolutionary development of human consciousness.'⁵⁹⁰ One way in which history can be viewed is as a spiral just as DNA is a spiral shape. Therefore, while it is not exactly a cycle in the true sense of the word, history is moving, forever changing and progressing just as a circle can change a little every time it completes a cycle, thus spiralling in never-ending motion through time and space. This idea connects the serpent or curly snake to eternal recurrence since it is shaped like a circle with its tail in its mouth, thus showing that everything goes back to the beginning and the cycle

⁵⁸⁷ Gish, 1984, p. 103.

⁵⁸⁸ Bold, 1983, p. 130.

⁵⁸⁹ Gish, 1984, p. 103.

⁵⁹⁰ Gish, 1984, p. 101.

starts again. According to J.E. Cirlot this type of snake is called an ‘Ouroborus’ – in Greek this means ‘the tail devourer’.⁵⁹¹ The Gnostics believed that this serpent or dragon was symbolic of time and of the continuity of life. It represented self-fecundation and a self-sufficient Nature which constantly returns to its own beginning due to its cyclical pattern. This image alternates with that of the snake that sheds its skin so that it always returns to its original state to start the process again.⁵⁹² The idea of eternal return or recurrence originated in ancient Egypt, passed to Phoenicia and was then developed in the teachings of Pythagoras. His theory was that time is infinite and yet there are a finite amount of actions in the universe so events will always recur – the universe moves in cycles and there is no final state.⁵⁹³ During the Renaissance and the Reformation the idea of eternal recurrence surfaced in writings by people such as the physician-philosopher, Sir Thomas Browne, in his *Religio Medici* of 1643. Browne was aware that the theory of eternal return differed considerably from the Judeo-Christian linear model of time:

And in this sense, I say, the world was before the Creation, and at an end before it had a beginning; and thus was I dead before I was alive, though my grave be England, my dying place was Paradise, and Eve miscarried of me before she conceived Cain.⁵⁹⁴

Browne also recorded his musings on the subject in his *A Letter to a Friend*:

That the first day should make the last, that the Tail of the Snake should return to its Mouth precisely at that time, and they should wind up upon the day of their Nativity, is indeed a remarkable Coincidence.⁵⁹⁵

It is understandable that the Gnostics and alchemists adopted the Ouroborus since it appears to be a symbol that is present in many mythologies, thus making it a universal image. In Norse mythology it is connected to Yggdrasil, the giant ash tree thought to connect the nine worlds of Norse cosmology. Beneath one of its roots is Mimir’s well in which wisdom and good sense can be found.⁵⁹⁶ In one of the Eddic Poems, ‘The Seeress’s Prophecy’, the

⁵⁹¹ J.E. Cirlot, *Dictionary of Symbols* (London: Routledge, 1971) p. 287.

⁵⁹² Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, pp. 728, 846.

⁵⁹³ <<http://plato-stanford-edu/entries/pythagoras/#FatSou>> {consulted on 27/9/06}

⁵⁹⁴ *Sir Thomas Browne’s Religio Medici and Other Works*, ed, by L.C. Martin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) p. 54.

⁵⁹⁵ Martin, 1964, p. 182.

⁵⁹⁶ R.I. Page, *Norse Myths* (London: British Museum Press, 1994) p. 58.

following stanza describes this tree:

I know that an ash-tree stands called Yggdrasill,
a high tree, soaked with shining loam;
from there come the dews which fall in the valley,
ever green, it stands over the well of fate.⁵⁹⁷

In another poem, ‘Grimnir’s Sayings’, Yggdrasil is described as being home to a squirrel who runs carrying tales between an eagle at the top of the tree and a dragon, Nidhogg, who is coiled at the bottom of the tree:

Ratatosk is the squirrel’s name, who has to run
upon the ash of Yggdrasill;
the eagle’s word he must bring from above
and tell to Nidhogg below.⁵⁹⁸

As well as the dragon, serpents are also connected to Yggdrasil – ‘More serpents lie under the ash of Yggdrasill/ than any fool can imagine.’⁵⁹⁹ Also in Norse mythology the Ouroboros appears as Iormungand the serpent, one of the three children of Loki. Iormungand grew so large it could encircle the world and take its tail into its own mouth.⁶⁰⁰ In the legends of Ragnar Lodbrok, a semi-legendary King of Sweden and Denmark who ruled in the 8th or 9th century, the Geatish King Herraud gives a small lindorm as a gift to his daughter, Þora. It grows into a large serpent and encircles the girl’s bower, biting itself in the tail. Ragnar Lodbrok kills the serpent and marries Þora. He later has a son with another woman, Kráka, and the son is born with the image of a white snake in one eye. The snake encircles the boy’s iris and bites its tail and the son becomes known as Sigurd Snake-Eye.⁶⁰¹ Moving away from Norse mythology, the Ouroboros can also be found in Hindu tradition. In Hindu mythology there is said to be a dragon that encircles a tortoise. The tortoise in turn supports the four elephants that carry the world.⁶⁰² In Aztec art the plumed serpent, Quetzalcoatl, is often portrayed as an Ouroboros.⁶⁰³

⁵⁹⁷ *The Poetic Edda*, translated by Carolyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) p. 6.

⁵⁹⁸ Larrington, 1996, p. 56.

⁵⁹⁹ Larrington, 1996, p. 56.

⁶⁰⁰ Page, 1994, p. 47.

⁶⁰¹ Munch, Peter Andreas, *Norse Mythology: Legends of Gods and Heroes*. Trans. from Norwegian by Sigurd Bernhard Hustvedt (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1926) p. 248.

⁶⁰² Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, pp. 1016-1017

⁶⁰³ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 848.

It is interesting that the Ouroboros is present in many stories from around the world relating to the gods and to creation myths. Cirlot suggests that this may be because the serpent symbolises energy and the life force in all things.⁶⁰⁴ The prolific writer of the early Church, Hippolytus (?-AD235), writes that the snake was said to live in all beings and this corresponds to the Hindu belief in Kundalini energy. Kundalini is inner strength and energy and is represented as a snake coiled up upon itself in a circle in the spinal column. If spiritually exercised the snake uncoils itself and stretches up through the chakras in the body until it reaches the ‘third eye of Shiva’, which is located in a person’s forehead. At this point a person may be able to gain a sense of the eternal.⁶⁰⁵ C.G. Jung, who was aware that snakes often represented transformation, noted the idea of a force rising up in the shape of a snake. Jung seems to be hinting at the idea of the serpent as life force, connected to death and rebirth when he writes:

The uroboros is a dramatic symbol for the integration and assimilation of the opposite, i.e. of the Shadow. This ‘feed-back’ process is at the same time a symbol of immortality, since it is said of the uroboros that he slays himself and brings himself back to life, fertilises himself and gives birth to himself. He symbolises the One, who proceeds from the clash of opposites, and he therefore constitutes the secret of the prima materia which... unquestionably stems from man’s unconscious.⁶⁰⁶

Jung is using the symbol of the ouroboros to describe the process of individuation, whereby the conscious self interacts with the unconscious. In the early twentieth century Harold Bayley had suggested that the snake, with its sinuous shape similar to the waves, could be ‘a symbol of the wisdom of the deeps and of the great mysteries’;⁶⁰⁷ while more recently Cirlot has written that in Western thought the sea serpent emphasises the ‘integration of the symbolism of the unconscious with that of the abyss.’⁶⁰⁸ Certainly, the deep sea is a good metaphor for the deep unconscious and in many myths the deep primordial water is the dwelling place of the serpent. In Norse mythology the serpent of Midgard lies at the bottom of the sea and the deluge and the end of the world will take place when the serpent

⁶⁰⁴ Cirlot, 1971, p. 285.

⁶⁰⁵ Cirlot, 1971, p. 288.

⁶⁰⁶ *CW*, Vol 14.

⁶⁰⁷ Cirlot, 1971, p. 286. See also Harold Bayley, *The Lost Language of Symbolism: an inquiry into the origin of certain letters, words, names, fairy-tales, folklore and mythologies*. (London: Williams and Norgate, 1912).

⁶⁰⁸ Cirlot, 1971, p. 289.

awakens.⁶⁰⁹ Jung saw this as a very apt metaphor within a psychological context – the unconscious is lying ‘coiled’ like a snake in the deep and will express itself by rising up unexpectedly just like the ‘apocalyptic’ movement of the serpent in myth. This sudden ‘rising’ may be a symptom of anguish and the stirrings in the unconscious can be a sign of the reactivation of its destructive personality.⁶¹⁰

The idea of a primordial sea serpent stretches back to Sumerian myth and is carried through to the Babylonian gods – Tiamat, the great serpent of saltwater oceans and Abzu of the sweet water were the first Babylonian gods and engendered a whole line of other gods. Tiamat was thought to represent chaos and was threatening to destroy the world. Marduk, champion of the younger gods, killed Tiamat by splitting her in two – one half became the roof of the heavens and the other half was the surface of the earth.⁶¹¹ Tiamat may be an earlier incarnation of the Hebrew sea serpent, Leviathan.⁶¹² Leviathan can be translated in Hebrew as meaning ‘twisted’ or ‘coiled’.⁶¹³ There are many mentions of Leviathan in the Old Testament – in Isaiah 27:1, for example, it is written that ‘On that day the Lord will use his powerful and deadly sword to punish Leviathan, that wriggling, twisting dragon, and to kill the monster that lives in the sea.’⁶¹⁴ In this context Leviathan may be a metaphor for the nations that were oppressing Israel - perhaps Egypt, Babylon or Persia.⁶¹⁵ In Hebrew tradition Leviathan and his mate were created by God but He killed the female so that they could not procreate and salted it for the righteous.⁶¹⁶ In the Talmud it is said that Leviathan will be slain and eaten by the righteous in the Time to Come and that the skin of the monster will be used as a cover for the tent in which the banquet of the righteous will take place. Some commentators interpret

⁶⁰⁹ Cirlot, 1971, p. 287.

⁶¹⁰ Cirlot, 1971, p. 287. For a detailed exploration of this subject see C.G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, CW, Vol 5 (London, 1956).

⁶¹¹ Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary* (London: British Museum Press, 1992) p. 177.

⁶¹² John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) p. 2.

⁶¹³ Day, 1985, p. 4

⁶¹⁴ Isaiah 27:1

⁶¹⁵ Day, 1985, p. 112.

⁶¹⁶ *The Babylonian Talmud – Seder Nezikin*, edited and translated by Rabbi Dr I. Epstein (London: The Soncino Press, 1935) p. 296.

this as a symbolic account of the end of conflict.⁶¹⁷ There are shades of Leviathan in the Canaanite myth of the monster, Litan, a coiling serpent with seven heads. It is understandable, given the history of sea monsters in these traditions, that by the time Leviathan is mentioned in the Old Testament he was viewed as a symbol of the pre-existent forces of chaos – ‘Lo let the night be solitary, let no joyful cry be heard in it. Let them curse it who curse the day, who are ready to awake the Leviathan.’⁶¹⁸ In the Book of Job there is a lengthy description of the monster including these lines below:

He churns up the sea like boiling water
and makes it bubble like a pot of oil.
He leaves a shining path behind him
and turns the sea to white foam.
There is nothing on earth to compare with him;
he is a creature that has no fear.
He looks down on even the proudest animals;
he is king of all wild beasts.⁶¹⁹

Leviathan seems to have been an enemy of the order within creation and in the Jewish tradition he was a symbol of everything that warred against the Kingdom of God. In Psalm 74 God appears triumphant over evil and chaos:

But you have been our king from the
beginning, O God;
you have saved us many times.
With your mighty strength you divided the sea
and smashed the heads of the sea-monsters
you crushed the heads of the monster Leviathan
and fed his body to desert animals.⁶²⁰

The idea of Leviathan as being synonymous with chaos and an enemy of God is perhaps the main influence behind the early medieval story of St Patrick and the ‘Lough Derg monster’. A giant water serpent was tricked into staying at the bottom of Lough Derg by St Patrick. He had to stay there until *Là Luain* – the snake understood this to mean ‘Monday’ but it can also mean the apocalyptic Last Day. Thus, according to the story the sea monster will only arise out of the water at the apocalypse.⁶²¹ Perhaps Sorley MacLean has these types of stories in

⁶¹⁷ Rabbi Dr I. Epstein, 1935, p. 299.

⁶¹⁸ Job 3:8

⁶¹⁹ Job 41:31-34.

⁶²⁰ Psalm 74: 12-14.

⁶²¹ The main connection between St Patrick and snakes is that he is said to have rid Ireland of snakes which were synonymous with evil. This is often seen as a metaphor for the abandonment of pagan belief in Ireland and the coming of Christianity. See James MacKillop, *Dictionary of Celtic Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 322.

mind in his apocalyptic-tinged description of the serpent being lifted out of the water to strike heaven with its fangs. The Gaelic Fraoch legend may also be a point of reference here.⁶²² The Book of Revelation has many descriptions of monsters that appear at the Final Judgement to wreak havoc and chaos on the world before the New Jerusalem and the Coming of Christ. The idea of the serpent as Satan is mentioned in the Book of Revelation in which there is a description of the war in heaven – Michael and his angels fight the dragon/Satan and he is thrown out of heaven to roam the earth until the Judgement:

The huge dragon was thrown out – that ancient serpent, called the Devil, or Satan, that deceived the whole world. He was thrown down to earth, and all his angels with him.⁶²³

It is not the first time that Satan is connected to the serpent in the Bible. In Genesis the serpent is coiled around the tree of knowledge and tempts Eve with the fruit.⁶²⁴ This is evidently a motif that is familiar in many world myths – I have already mentioned the myth of Yggdrasil, the world tree with the serpent at its base and in early Sumerian art there are depictions of an axis/tree with a snake intertwined around it as well as the mythical date palm with the two fruits representing life and enlightenment – this tree is also guarded by a serpent.⁶²⁵ The myths that I have looked at in this section go some way to showing the universal aspects of the serpent symbol and are useful motifs to keep in mind when studying the symbol in the work of both Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley MacLean.

5.2.3 The Symbol of the Serpent in MacLean's Work

I have so far looked at the serpent in MacDiarmid's work and studied the wider meaning of this symbol in world myth. However, it is necessary to view the serpent from MacLean's own poetic perspective if 'An Cuilithionn' and its symbols are to be fully understood. It is clear that MacLean refers to 'Cencrastus' in 'An Cuilithionn', but this does not mean that the symbol has to contain exactly the same meaning in the two poems. The snake, Cencrastus, may be referred to, but 'An Cuilithionn' is about MacLean's own view of the world, and therefore it may take on MacLean's own vision and meanings. This is a good example of Jung's theory that there are archetypes and archetypal images. Archetypes are inherited structuring patterns that are best viewed as containers. They only take on content when a

⁶²² See Donald Meek, 'Tàin Bó Fraích and other Fráech-Texts: A Study in Thematic Relationships' (two parts) in *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 7 (Summer 1984) pp. 1-37 and 8 (Winter 1984) pp. 65-85.

⁶²³ Revelation 12:9.

⁶²⁴ Genesis 3.

⁶²⁵ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 274.

person invests their own meaning into them and then they become archetypal images.⁶²⁶ Thus, Cencrastus, or the sea-serpent in general, is an archetype and MacDiarmid and MacLean both invest into this archetype what is meaningful for them, making the serpent an archetypal image in ‘To Circumjack Cencrastus’ and ‘An Cuilithionn’.

Before looking at MacLean’s own symbols it is worth noting that the idea of the sea being churned up and sea-monsters coming to the surface can be found within a Gaelic context with Alastair mac Mhaighstir Alastair’s ‘Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill’ making mention of this in its last part, when the ship runs into a storm before reaching its destination at Carrickfergus:

Foghar na fairge ’s a slachdraich
Gleachd r’ a darach,
Fosghair a toisich a’ bocsaich
Mhuca-mara.⁶²⁷

The storm, which the sailors encounter, is terrifying and the sense of chaos is emphasised. MacLean would, without doubt, have been familiar with this poem – he dedicates ‘An Cuilithionn’ to mac Mhaighstir Alastair. The poem is widely viewed as a Gaelic epic and therefore he would have been well aware of its motifs and would perhaps have been inclined to make references to it in ‘An Cuilithionn’, which has its fair share of apocalyptic motifs. MacLean also supplied MacDiarmid with a translation of the ‘Birlinn’ in the mid-1930s, which MacDiarmid used in his *Golden Treasury*.

Regarding MacLean’s own work, the serpent is a major symbol in ‘Coilltean Ratharsair’⁶²⁸ – this poem was composed shortly after ‘An Cuilithionn’ and has similar ideals although they are expressed in a different way. Where the Cuillin is a symbol of thrusting power and potentially new beginnings the wood is a much more complex place for MacLean, teeming with life and creativity that emerges in a subtler form. His muse and love are explored in ‘Coilltean Ratharsair’ and, as in *Dàin do Eimhir*⁶²⁹ and ‘An Cuilithionn’, this theme can have both a negative and positive effect on the poet. The wood is like Eden for MacLean but at the centre of this Eden there is always the underlying presence of the serpent. The wood is

⁶²⁶ Rowland, 1999, p. 226.

⁶²⁷ *Sar Orain: Gaelic Poems*, ed. by A. MacLeod (Glasgow: An Comunn Gaidhealach, 1933) p. 56. See also *Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair: Selected Poems*, ed. by Derick S. Thomson (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1966) for a further discussion of ‘Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill’. This motif can also be linked to the feeling of abjection which I discussed in Chapter 3 in relation to water images and the ‘other’.

⁶²⁸ MacLean, 1999, pp. 170-183.

⁶²⁹ Whyte, 2002.

described as ‘coille aoibhneach bhrònach ghràdhach’⁶³⁰ and also:

Bu choille Ratharsair an té
 a liubhair pòg mheala réidh,
 a’ phòg nach fóghnadh do ’n chré,
 a’ phòg chuir luasgan ’sa chléibh.⁶³¹

The wood is a metaphor for a woman – the Gaelic word for wood, ‘coille’, is a feminine noun. Like MacLean’s muse it embodies the dual nature of love because it has the potential to be positive and also negative, driving the poet to insanity by withholding love or creativity. The unrest of the poet searching for inspiration in the depths of the wood is akin to a man searching for the love of his beloved. The idea of the garden or wood of paradise with the underlying danger of something sinister in its depths adds to the allusion of the wood as an Eden with the Biblical snake at its centre. Máire Ní Annracháin has also alluded to the connection between the snake, with its dangerous yet sensual undertones, the Garden of Eden and the Cuillin, which is also linked to desire in ‘Coilltean Ratharsair’ and ‘An Cuilithionn’.⁶³² In the Bible the negativity in the Garden of Eden was provided by the presence of the snake and by extension, by Eve’s connection to the snake. In ‘Coilltean Ratharsair’ the female and the snake are once again linked:

Dhùisg an nathair 'na lùisreadh,
 'na duilleach ioma-luath caol ùrar,
 'na geugan duilleagach gu ciùrradh,
 gath a’ chràdhghal anns an t-sùgradh.⁶³³

This stanza is MacLean’s version of what MacDiarmid would describe as the psycho-somatic quandary of human sexuality.⁶³⁴ The lovemaking that is pleasurable in the poet’s mind also brings with it the threat of physical wounding. The paradox is that pain and pleasure can be inextricably linked and the snake embodies this paradox – it can be seen as a phallic symbol due to its ability to become straight, much as it does in ‘An Cuilithionn’ when it strikes out at heaven from the mountain. Interestingly in relation to this, the serpent encircling the mountain is thought, especially in the East, to be phallic in character.⁶³⁵ The wood itself is a symbol with many meanings and the sexual imagery is only one layer in a more complex whole. Poets such as MacDiarmid and MacLean had no trouble in viewing creativity and energy as having a sexual element and this relates very well to the kundalini energy that I

⁶³⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 176.

⁶³¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 178.

⁶³² See Ní Annracháin, 1992, p. 65.

⁶³³ MacLean, 1999, p. 176.

⁶³⁴ Buthlay, 1982, p. 46.

⁶³⁵ Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* (New York: The Scarecrow Press Inc, 1962) p. 1419.

have already explored in the last section of this chapter. The pursuit of love or art contains ecstasy and the danger of failure. In this context the wood is a symbol of all the potential of the psyche – it is a metaphor for the unconscious which can have many symbols lurking in its depths. These symbols can take on many forms depending on the will of the poet:

Och a' choille, och a' choille,
 dé na tha 'na doimhne dhoilleir!
 Mìltean nathraichean 'na lùisreadh:
 an t-aoibhneas 's e briste brùite
 agus an cràdh bha riamh ciùrrte,
 nach toir bàrr air a' chiùrradh.⁶³⁶

The greenery and undergrowth are rich in inspiration – the rising sap is a sexual image and has connotations of creativity as the ‘wine’ of the unconscious spirit:

Tha eòl air slighe an t-snodhaich
 a' drùdhadh suas gu ghnothach,
 am fìon sìor ùrar beothail
 gun fhios dha fhéin, gun oilean.⁶³⁷

Nature, like the snake, can be both positive and negative – it is a law unto itself.

While there is the underlying presence of the snake in the wood there is also a more overt reference to it in ‘Coilltean Ratharsair’ in relation to the mountain and this reference is consistent with the serpent as it is portrayed in ‘An Cuilithionn’. In a comparison between the wood and the mountain, Sgurr nan Gillean is described in sublime terms:

'S e Sgurr nan Gillean a' bheithir
 cholgarr a gharbh le cheithir
 binneanan carrach ceann-chaol sreathach:
 Ach 's ann tha e bho speur eile.⁶³⁸

‘beithir’ can mean serpent or dragon in Gaelic and in this instance the mountain is likened to a serpent with its pinnacles becoming like the serrated back-bone or even the horns of the monster. The mountain is viewed as a great monstrosity made of rock with the features of a serpent-like creature and it is perhaps not too far removed from the description in ‘An Cuilithionn’ of the sea-monster coiling around the mountain. In ‘An Cuilithionn’ the serpent is linked closely with the Cuillin but it remains as a separate entity. However, by the time ‘Coilltean Ratharsair’ was composed the serpent and the mountain are one and the same. The

⁶³⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 180.

⁶³⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 182.

⁶³⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 174.

two images are similar – in both instances the serpent is seen as an energetic, powerful and threatening metamorphosis of the mountain. This image is a far cry from the mysterious and earthy snake found deep in the wood in Raasay but it contains the same ability to be a symbol of change and thrusting energy. The serpent in ‘An Cuilithionn’ thrusts outwards to heaven from its place on the mountaintop and in ‘Coilltean Ratharsair’ Sgurr nan Gillean also has this sense of thrusting – the dragon-like mountain is also described as having the horn of a white unicorn, leaving little doubt about its phallic undertones:

’na shitheadh sleagha air an fhàire,
sgurra foinnidh geal na h-àilleachd,
sgurra m’iargain ’s mo shàth-ghaoil,
Sgurra ’s biothbhuan suain thar Clàraich.⁶³⁹

The polar opposites of the depths of the ocean or wood and the top of the rising mountain are embodied in the description of the sea-serpent in ‘An Cuilithionn’. The change in its shape is significant to its overall meaning in the poem. By coming out of the sea and becoming part of the mountain, which is also a symbol of hope and change, the serpent is bringing something to a conclusion. By striking out and changing shape the impression is that energy and action are at play. The fact that the serpent is showing its fangs suggests that this change in movement is linked to an attack of some kind. It may be that it is an attack on the old order, whether this old order represents capitalism and/or the Establishment in the shape of religion. This would make sense in relation to the surrounding stanzas in Part VII of the poem – it is clear that MacLean had Biblical themes in mind here with references to Christ and Jahweh.⁶⁴⁰ At the start of Part VII MacLean suggests that the world will always have need of a God-like hero such as Christ and that a sacrifice will always be demanded. However, this sacrifice does not necessarily have to be of a specifically religious nature:

Dh’aom Iupiter, an gealtair brùideil,
agus Iahweh an t-Iùdhach
ach cha dànaig àm riamh
’s nach d’fhuair uachdarain dia
a chrochadh air na beanntan cràbhach
colann ìobairt nan sàr-fhear.⁶⁴¹

MacLean is subtly attacking established world religions by insinuating that there can be more than one saviour. It is therefore rather apt that it is the enemy of God, the serpent, who is seen

⁶³⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 174.

⁶⁴⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

⁶⁴¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

to be attacking heaven in Part VII. MacLean envisages a new time to come in which the people will find their voices from Communist principles and it is thus possible to view the sea-serpent as heralding this new age. The serpent, which already has connotations of being at war with God due to the happenings in the Garden of Eden, is a suitable symbol to oppose God in heaven over the wrongs of the world. Part VII is full of references to MacLean's vision of a new dawn for the people – 'Chualas iolach air na sléibhtean,/ gàir shaorsa an t-sluaigh ag éirigh'⁶⁴² and it is interesting that the serpent rising out of the waves occurs at the same point in the poem. The apocalyptic context of the sea-serpent can be both positive and negative depending on the stance taken in relation to it being a Socialist or Communist symbol – the apocalypse could mean the end of the world and the beginning of a new one in 'An Cuilithionn'. In a letter to Douglas Young, MacLean asserts that there are no absolutes in his poem and that Christ and Lenin are both able to exist on the Cuillin.⁶⁴³ It may be that MacLean is echoing MacDiarmid's idea in *To Circumjack Cencrastus* that there are no true oppositions.⁶⁴⁴ In the same way, the serpent is coiled around the mountain and then in the very next stanza Christ is also present on the mountain – 'Chunnacas Criosda [sic] dol mun chuairt/ air a' mhullach lom fhuar.'⁶⁴⁵ It would be wrong to see a battle between good and evil as being played out on the mountain when the symbols are capable of mingling as easily as this – the symbols are far more ambivalent in terms of good and evil. This view can be supported by the fact that the other 'monsters' envisioned by MacLean in Part VII are the vultures that are connected to MacLean's love:

Chaidh mo ghaol liom air a' bheinn
fiach an cluinneadh i an t-seinn
a bha air stùcan nan ceum gàbhaidh;
chual is leth-thuig i 'm mànrann
agus air ball bha cruth na biataich
air a bòidhche ghil chianail
Agus 's ann tholl i mo chliathaich.⁶⁴⁶

However, the vultures are not confined to this nightmarish vision – MacLean writes that 'biataichean geala 's breuna'⁶⁴⁷ are present on the mountain and that the birds also will react against the Establishment:

⁶⁴² MacLean, 1999, p. 124.

⁶⁴³ Acc 6419 Box 38b, NLS.

⁶⁴⁴ Christ and Lenin also occupy the same poetic space in *Dàin do Eimhir* III. See Whyte, 2002, p. 47. In the first stanza of the poem Christ's suffering on earth is mentioned while in the third stanza 'tuigse Lenin' is also evoked. In this instance suffering of the masses and political commitment are severely compromised by MacLean's love for Eimhir.

⁶⁴⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 124.

⁶⁴⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

⁶⁴⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

Reubaidh gob an èin an toibheum
a tha air bilean an naomh-oilein.⁶⁴⁸

The vultures and the sea-serpent are not one-dimensional – there is definitely room for more than one interpretation about the reason for their presence in ‘An Cuilithionn’.

Sorley MacLean takes MacDiarmid’s ‘Cencrastus’ symbol and develops it to suit his own poetry. The sea-serpent in ‘An Cuilithionn’ can be viewed as having two aspects. The first aspect involves it being coiled at the bottom of the sea – ‘bha i cearclach an ám ruagaidh/ a-mach á doimhne nan cuantan.’⁶⁴⁹ The ‘shape’ of the serpent in this part of the stanza is most similar to MacDiarmid’s Cencrastus, the Ouroborus. It is only when the serpent straightens out that it becomes MacLean’s own individual symbol and more in keeping with MacLean’s vision of the purpose of ‘An Cuilithionn’. It may be productive to see the coiled snake as the cyclical symbol of the Modernists. Certainly, in MacDiarmid’s poetry cycles are important – he sees history as being capable of repeating and this was a theme that was also explored by the likes of James Joyce and T.S. Eliot.⁶⁵⁰ However when the snake becomes straight – ‘ach a nise tha i dìreach’⁶⁵¹ – it is clear that another narrative structure is underlying the symbol. Although cycles are important to ‘An Cuilithionn’ the serpent appears to break out of this structure and the straight line between the mountain and the heavens that it creates is far more in keeping with the Biblical and Socialist ‘myth’ that has a beginning and an end. The Biblical narrative begins with Adam and ends with the second coming of Christ. In other words, a conclusion is reached and the cycle of sin is broken. In the Socialist myth the cycle of repression and suffering is broken when the revolution takes place and a new dawn is ushered in by this change. I think that MacLean’s sea-serpent represents the change from the cyclical pattern to a narrative with an end and it also symbolises the energy that is needed to change the established system.

5.3 Energy in Motion: The Stallion in ‘An Cuilithionn’

Energy reverberates throughout ‘An Cuilithionn’ and is perhaps best exhibited in MacLean’s symbol of the Skye Stallion. Unlike the Cencrastus/sea-serpent symbol the

⁶⁴⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

⁶⁴⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

⁶⁵⁰ For more discussion of this topic see Chapter 5 of this thesis.

⁶⁵¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

Stallion appears to be more completely a symbol of MacLean's own local landscape of Skye (it is a topographical feature in Waternish, Skye, although far removed from the Cuillin itself). It then becomes more universal as the poem progresses. However, he nevertheless embodies the same meaning as the serpent in many cases. Like the serpent, he is a symbol which seems to emerge from the depths of the landscape before ascending to the heights of the Cuillin. He is associated with the sea and is rugged in appearance due to actually being a representation of the great sea-cliff of Waternish. MacLean makes this clear in the manuscript of the English translation in a footnote – 'The Stallion or wild Stallion is the magnificent sea-cliff at Waterstein used as a symbol of the heroic conception of Skye in Scotland.'⁶⁵² By the time 'An Cuilithionn' was published the footnote had been removed but it is clear from the descriptions of the animal as 'rocky' and 'craggy' that the Stallion is a part of the landscape which has taken on a life of its own:

Bha roghainn nan each móra creagach
a' bocail air Sgurr a' Ghreadaidh,
leum an Eist mhór fhiadhaich
tarsainn iomallan nan crìochan;⁶⁵³

The symbol of the Stallion is most pronounced in Part V but he has already been mentioned as a gelding before this:

An cuala sibh an sgeul salach
mar rinneadh air an Aigich Dhalach?
Beag siod dhen gnìomharan trùillich,
obair uachdaran 's am fùidsean.⁶⁵⁴

In Part III MacLean connects the Stallion to the events in Glendale and Braes where the people rose up to challenge the authority of the landowners – it was an inspiring event during a period in which the people were far more likely to be oppressed to the point of not being able to rise up and defend their rights and for this reason the power and energy of the Stallion is a fitting symbol:

Bha uair a chuala mi le annsachd
mu dhannsa fhrioghan air a cheann-san
nuair thogadh anns an Eilean meirghe
breac le lot is sgàrlaid feirge.⁶⁵⁵

However, MacLean shows that more events such as the Battle of the Braes are needed if the

⁶⁵² MS 29559, NLS, f. 15.

⁶⁵³ MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

⁶⁵⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 88.

⁶⁵⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 90.

Stallion is to rise up from oppression and impotency and reach his full power. He imagines what it would have been like to harness this power and energy:

Saoil nan robh mi fhìn 'na dhìollaid
 Nuair thàinig faramachd na bliadhna,
 An robh mi air beireachd air MacDhiarmaid,
 Ge cruaidh a dhoineanachd thar iarmailt?
 An robh mi air beireachd air MacDhòmhnail,
 A dh'aindeoin beithir-theine a ghlòir-san?⁶⁵⁶

MacLean shows that history has not been kind to his people and that it is only now, at the present time in which he composed 'An Cuilithionn', that the Stallion can rise up to his full strength due to the presence of Communism which is moving across Europe. The symbol of heroism has been heard of in Braes and Glendale but apart from this MacLean hints that the Stallion is largely unheard of in other parts of Scotland and that it is from other countries that it must emerge:

An deach innse dha na Dalaich
 mar thachair dhan each lùthmhor allail?
 An deach innse anns a' Bhràighe
 dìol an ainmhidh mheanmnaich làidir?
 Chualas anns an Ruis 's 's na h-Innsean,
 san Fhraing 's le muillionan na Sìne,
 ach cha d' ràinig am fios Alba,⁶⁵⁷

This stanza is the strongest indication that the Stallion not only symbolises heroism for MacLean, but a specific brand of Socialist heroism, since the countries that MacLean mentions above have all had chapters of revolutionary left-wing politics in their own history. Part V, in which the Stallion makes his most pronounced appearance, is the lyrical peak of 'An Cuilithionn' and thus the Stallion can be viewed as a central symbol. He represents energy and power directed in a positive way in the eyes of the poet. Like the serpent he challenges the Establishment that MacLean mistrusts so much – 'Siod ort fhéin, Aigich lùthmhoir,/ prannaigh tu bùirdeasachd nam fùidsean'.⁶⁵⁸ The Stallion and the sea-serpent are two symbols with a relationship to the mountain and are an embodiment of MacLean's desire for a surge of energy to move the world out of the bourgeois bog. Although the serpent and the Stallion do not have an explicit relationship to each other in the poem their purposes are

⁶⁵⁶ It is highly possible that MacLean might have risen to the challenge of becoming a great political poet to rival MacDiarmid and Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair, especially when his early poems such as 'An Cuilithionn' are considered alongside the work of these other two poets. MacLean, 1999, p. 90.

⁶⁵⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 88.

⁶⁵⁸ MacLean, 1999, pp. 96-98.

inherently linked and each helps to illuminate the purpose and usage of the other. The Stallion helps to show that the ideas which are briefly explored in the sea-serpent stanza actually have a far wider scope. Symbols of energy and change dominate ‘An Cuilithionn’ and underline the importance of this theme to the poem as a whole.

5.3.1 The Stallion’s Movement on the Peaks of the Mountain

Like the pattern of movement which the poet makes in Part I and II as he journeys on the mountain, the Stallion, with his entrance in Part V, also moves from peak to peak on the Cuillin and the route he takes deserves attention in relation to the overall sense of movement inherent in the poem. The Stallion is first glimpsed on Sgurr a’ Ghreadaidh.⁶⁵⁹ Its size can be imagined when MacLean writes that:

chuir e chas air Sgurra nan Gillean
's e prannsail air bàrr a' Bhidein,⁶⁶⁰

In other words, the Stallion is able to be on Sgurr nan Gillean and the Bidean at the same time – these two peaks are relatively far apart and hint at the sheer mythic size of the Stallion. This is no normal-sized animal but instead is a vision which matches the sublime landscape of Skye, and in particular the magnificent Cuillin range. So far the Stallion has been moving in a clockwise sweep around the mountain peaks and this direction is continued when he jumps from this area of the Cuillin to Sgurr na h-Uamha and then to Blaven:

leum e le lùths an àrdain
o Sgurra na h-Uamha gu Blàbheinn⁶⁶¹

He is now in the south-easterly area of the Cuillin and continues to move in a circular clockwise direction:

agus o Bhlàbheinn thug e gàmag
gu mullach adharach na Gàrsbheinn;
gheàrr e boc dhe Sgurr an Fheadain
's e fàgail uamhaltachd na creige
gus an d' ràinig e 'n càthar,
a stamp e mar aon pholl-dàmhair.⁶⁶²

Thus, by moving from Blaven to Garsbheinn and then to Sgurr an Fheadain the Stallion also traverses the mountain ridge, echoing the poet’s own journey in Part I and II. While MacLean

⁶⁵⁹ ‘Bha roghainn nan each móra creagach/ a’ bocail air Sgurr a’ Ghreadaidh’. MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

⁶⁶⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

⁶⁶¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

⁶⁶² MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

himself has claimed that the Stallion symbolises the heroic presence of Skye in Scotland and also stands for the force of Socialism which MacLean would like to see sweep across Europe and reach Scotland, the Stallion also mirrors the poet's own energy and drive in relation to his hopes for Scotland and the rest of the world. The Stallion moves from peak to peak, but throughout 'An Cuilithionn' it becomes evident that the Skye landscape is a miniature of the world itself, suspended in a mythic environment containing all of space and time. Therefore in a figurative sense, the Stallion could be said to be moving around the whole of the world, spreading his energy and power to heroes from all periods of history. It is for this reason that MacLean can connect him with the struggle of the Glendale men as well as the political power of an emergent force of twentieth-century Socialism - his is the energy which is required for any historic struggle, and it is no coincidence that he rises up to the heights of the Cuillin, since the Cuillin also symbolises heroic strength in the poem. The Stallion, rising as he does from his status as a gelding, is yet another symbol demonstrating movement, which incorporates the pattern of journeying from suffering to heroic energy throughout history. It is the Stallion's movement on the mountain which adds the sense of hope that begins to develop in the latter parts of 'An Cuilithionn'.

5.3.2 The Skye Stallion: Comparisons with Classical Symbols

While the Skye Stallion appears to be a symbol which is firmly located in the local landscape and is thus a highly original creation of MacLean's, it is possible that the poet was subtly influenced by the idea of Pegasus from Classical Greek mythology. If this is indeed the case the Stallion would provide an appropriate connection to the other symbol in 'An Cuilithionn' – the muse, Clio - who is also taken from Classical sources. Both symbols are located on the mountain and both are invested with a great deal of energy and power. Poseidon fathered Pegasus, the winged horse, on one of the Gorgons and he was born at one of the ocean springs. Pegasus has always been linked to water. His name is similar to the Greek, *pege*, meaning 'spring' and Pegasus was said to have made water spring from the mountain-side by striking his hooves on the rocks.⁶⁶³ The Skye Stallion is in keeping with this imagery since the descriptions of him in Part V in particular relate him to water:

Eich mhóir a' chuain,
Mo ghaol do ghruaim;
Eich mheanmnaich
An t-seana chin chruaidh:

⁶⁶³ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 746.

...
 a steud nan cuantan,
 's tu th' air mo bhuaireadh,
 's mo chridhe luaineach
 le d' luasgan shùl.⁶⁶⁴

It appears that the Stallion, as a representation of the great sea-cliff of Waternish, is made up of the sea and of the rocky landscape, hence the description of the bubbling crags becoming hard as rock:

Chunnacas manadh mór is uilebheist,
 An t-Aigeach a' sitrich air a' Chuilithionn,
 Éirigh nan creagan a bha builgeadh,
 Air an tug an spiorad tulgadh.⁶⁶⁵

In this section it seems that the purifying energy of the water, which in the shape of the Stallion has washed away the stagnant bog, hardens to become one with the mountain, brought into being with the effort of the spirit. The sea has always played an important part in the shaping of any island and the Skye coastline is no exception. The energy of the sea has changed everything over time and has displaced and pushed together rocks to shape what the poet now sees as his native landscape. The power of the sea has grafted and shaped the Waternish Stallion from minerals. MacLean would have spent years looking at the shape of the land and would have been well aware that the sea had played an important part in this process millions of years ago and is still playing its part, with the tides invisibly working on the rocks. Just as Pegasus was born from the sea, so too is the Skye Stallion a symbol of the energy which is born from water and rock. MacLean's symbol of the Stallion is a manifestation of the energy inherent in the landscape. The Stallion represents change – his entry in Part V alters the pace of the poem and forms one of the 'lyrical peaks' of 'An Cuilithionn'. While the crags and mountains in the poem appear to be constant and unchanging, the Stallion shows that MacLean is aware that at an appropriate moment the mountain does not represent constancy but transmutes movement, albeit over millions of years. Thus, another pair of oppositions can be identified in the poem. The time-span which MacLean is dealing with in 'An Cuilithionn' in relation to the nature of the Skye Stallion adds to the sense of mythology – the Stallion is sublime and almost beyond comprehension just as the change in mountains due to movement of water is beyond the scope of one human due to the shortness of his own life. Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant write that Pegasus,

⁶⁶⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 98.

⁶⁶⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

the winged horse, stands for ‘sublime and spiritual values’ – a creature able to raise mankind above ‘the perils of aberration’.⁶⁶⁶ While MacLean’s Stallion is not a winged horse, his ability to move from peak to peak of the Cuillin gives him the air of a horse ‘in flight’ and his ancient and powerful presence becomes a symbol of what can be achieved by mankind on a physical as well as a spiritual level.

As well as Pegasus being linked to water he was also viewed in relation to storms – ‘bearer of thunder and the thunderbolt for wise Zeus’.⁶⁶⁷ The appearance of MacLean’s Stallion is connected to a musicality of stormy weather when the drone of the MacCrimmon pipers, Pàdraig Mór and Pàdraig Óg, are heard:

Aigich ghairbh,
Chual thusa stoirm
Is glaothaich gairm
Duis fhoirmeil bhrais
o Phàdraig Mór
's o Phàdraig Og.⁶⁶⁸

The image of the Skye Stallion stamping the bourgeois into the bog also suggests that his hooves would be thunderous on the ground, especially with the imagery which MacLean employs:

Gheàrr e boc dhe Sgurr an Fheadain
's e fàgail uamhaltachd na creige
gus an d’ ràinig e ’n càthar,
a stamp e mar aon pholl-dàmhair.
Siod ort fhéin, Aigich lùthmhoir,
Prannaidh tu bùirdeasachd nam fùidsean,⁶⁶⁹

Continuing the theme of Classical imagery in relation to MacLean’s symbol it is relevant that Cirlot mentions the myth of Neptune (the Roman equivalent of Poseidon) with his trident, lashing out of the waves the horses which symbolise cosmic forces and ‘the blind force of primigenial chaos’.⁶⁷⁰ Interestingly, the horse was also dedicated to Mars and the sudden appearance of a horse was thought to be an omen of war.⁶⁷¹ The relationship of the horse with

⁶⁶⁶ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 746.

⁶⁶⁷ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 746.

⁶⁶⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 98.

⁶⁶⁹ MacLean, 1999, pp. 96-98.

⁶⁷⁰ Cirlot, 1971, p. 152.

⁶⁷¹ Cirlot, 1971, p. 152.

water, chaos and war is extremely appropriate when MacLean's Stallion is considered. In 'An Cuilithionn' the Stallion comes out of the sea and heralds a period of chaos in which the old order is severely challenged. Part V, in which the Stallion gains his strength and rises up, begins with a description of the dawn of a new age, presumably a Socialist age:

Chuala mi gum facas bristeadh
 Agus clisgeadh air an fhàire,
 Gum facas ròs dearg ùrail
 Thar saoghal brùite màbte;⁶⁷²

The establishment of a Communist regime throughout Europe and beyond could not be put in place without an element of chaos and with Communism being the opposite force to Fascism and capitalism it is perhaps not too difficult to imagine that MacLean viewed the appearance of the Stallion as a bringer of conflict and a symbol of resistance. It is not just Classical sources which envision the horse as a noble creature connected to war. In Celtic tradition the horse was an important tribal symbol, with the goddess, Epona being closely connected to the Otherworld. She was thought to have been a goddess of horse breeding as well as a deity of healing and death, and a guardian of territory and sovereignty.⁶⁷³ In Romano-Celtic Britain evidence of a horseman cult shows that the horse was connected with conflict but also had connotations of benevolent protection. The cult of Mars in Britain and Gaul exhibits this balance with statues of horsemen in full military regalia - presumably depictions of Mars - presiding over healing shrines thus showing that martial power can be used to guard people against evil. These sorts of celestial horseman gods were perceived as warriors and conquerors of evil and darkness.⁶⁷⁴ When these meanings are taken into consideration in relation to the Stallion, it can be seen as an apt symbol for MacLean's vision of the coming of Communism which he viewed as being the protector of the masses against the evil of Fascism and capitalism.

5.3.3 The Horse as Symbol

So far I have looked at possible comparisons between Classical images of the horse and the Skye Stallion in 'An Cuilithionn'. I have inferred that the Stallion is closely connected to water and that this is an idea which has been influenced by Greek and Roman mythology,

⁶⁷² MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

⁶⁷³ Miranda Aldhouse Green, 'The Symbolic Horse in Pagan Celtic Europe: An Archaeological Perspective' in *The Horse in Celtic Culture: Medieval Welsh Perspectives*. ed. by Sioned Davies and Nerys Ann Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997) pp. 1-22 (p. 14).

⁶⁷⁴ Green, 1997, pp. 14-15.

especially in relation to Pegasus. However, when the symbol of the horse is studied more generally it can be seen that its connection to water and earth is more widespread. Chevalier and Gheerbrant give the following description in their *Dictionary of Symbols*:

A belief, firmly seated in folk memory throughout the world, associates the horse in the beginning of time with darkness and with the chthonian world from which it sprang, cantering, like blood pulsating in the veins, out of the bowels of the Earth or from the depths of the sea. This archetypal horse was the mysterious child of darkness and carrier both of death and life, linked as it was to the destructive yet triumphant powers of Fire and to the nurturing yet suffocating powers of Water.⁶⁷⁵

Thus, the horse can be viewed as a chthonian symbol and MacLean's Stallion certainly corresponds to this description, being connected as it is with water and the rocks and mountains of the Skye landscape. Although it is clear in 'An Cuilithionn' that MacLean views the Skye Stallion as a positive force, the reader is nevertheless left in no doubt that the Stallion is wild and frightening, perhaps due to his relationship to the primal earth. He is described in extremely powerful terms so that, although there are stanzas which are reminiscent of Gaelic praise poems, the emphasis is on his frightening demeanour – 'Eich glais iargalt'.⁶⁷⁶ Horses frequently foretell of death in Greek mythology as well as in European folklore. One reason for this may be that because they are often connected to the depths of the earth they came to be seen as manifestations of otherworldly power. The Irish hero, Conall Cernach, is said to have owned an otherworldly horse with a hound's head which was capable of tearing the sides of his enemies. In the Welsh *Mabinogion*, Rhiannon, who is herself connected to the underworld, rides out from a mound on a white horse. She is followed by Pwyll who cannot catch up with her horse no matter how hard he tries despite Rhiannon's horse going at an easy pace. The idea of the horse coming out of the earth and possessing otherworldly powers is a familiar motif and even MacLean's Stallion has echoes of this sort of power - he is a manifestation of the earth itself and takes on an almost larger-than-life presence with his ability to traverse the mountain peaks in just a few gallops. In other instances the gloomy pale horse of night is associated with death mainly due to the pale horse of the Apocalypse and the pale horse in English and German folklore.⁶⁷⁷ The Stallion is mentioned as being pale, perhaps like the rocky landscape of Skye as seen on misty days -

⁶⁷⁵ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 516.

⁶⁷⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 100.

⁶⁷⁷ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, pp. 519-520.

‘Eich mhóir a’ chuain,/ mo ghaol do ghruaim;’ and also ‘eich ghlais sgiamhaich’.⁶⁷⁸ In Scottish folklore Kelpies were horse-like water demons who would tempt people to mount them and then pull them under the water. Breton folklore also has many stories of underworld horses trying to lead travellers astray or dash them into quagmires or morasses.⁶⁷⁹ This point is very significant in relation to MacLean’s Skye Stallion since he writes that the Stallion reached the moss ‘a stamp e mar aon pholl-dàmhair’.⁶⁸⁰ He is seen to win the battle over the morass, conquering it and stopping the suffering in its depths:

Prannaidh tu bùirdeasachd nam fùidsean,
Nì thu sìnteag thar na mointich;
(...)
chaille na boglaichean am mealladh.⁶⁸¹

It is clear that if the Stallion in ‘An Cuilithionn’ symbolises the potential death of anything it is the death of capitalism which figures highest in MacLean’s purpose in the poem.

Therefore, MacLean turns the negative connotations of the death horse into a positive celebration of the imagined end of capitalism - the Stallion is the foreteller of the end of an oppressive era and his journey around the Cuillin results in hope for the future of the world.

Chevalier and Gheerbrant write that its ‘swiftness associates the horse with time and hence with its continuity.’⁶⁸² It is for this reason that horses are often symbolised as the bringers of fertility and renewal after the harsh times of the winter months in agrarian communities. James Frazer describes an eyewitness account of Irish midsummer celebrations in which a wooden frame with a horse’s head was made to ‘jump’ over the bonfire, thus becoming a symbol of ‘all the livestock’ and a symbol of plenty in general. This ritual is mainly due to the horse’s driving power and dynamism and fits in well with the idea of the turning of the seasons to times of seasonal growth.⁶⁸³ The connotations of land and fertility in relation to horses evokes the mythic horses who were able to make wells spring up by striking their hooves on the earth – in the Massif Central in France there is a whole series of Bayard wells attributed to a magic horse who took this route and left wells along the way. In this context

⁶⁷⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 98.

⁶⁷⁹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 520.

⁶⁸⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

⁶⁸¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 98.

⁶⁸² Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 521.

⁶⁸³ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 522.

the symbol of the horse awakens the land and the water just as it awakens the flowing imagination, creativity, and the driving force of the libido which are associated with these elements in relation to both psychological theory and myth-theory. The Stallion is often viewed as an erotic symbol of youth and ‘the triumph of the life force’.⁶⁸⁴ In a general sense MacLean’s Stallion channels this sort of energy – he rises up, becoming a potent force on the Cuillin and stimulating the poet with his presence – ‘s tu th’ air mo bhuaireadh’.⁶⁸⁵

It is clear from the ideas that I have cited above that the horse is connected to both death and life due to the close relationship that it has with the elements of earth and water. However, it should be noted that the Stallion in ‘An Cuilithionn’ is not restricted to this meaning of the symbol. He is certainly a creature of the earth but the movement that the Stallion makes on the Cuillin endows him with the energy to rise up and reach towards the upper realms of the sky. The fact that Part V ends with a Gaelic translation of MacDiarmid’s poem, ‘If there are bounds to any man’ reinforces this theme. In Classical myth the majestic horse draws the sun-god’s chariot and in the Book of Revelation (19: 11) Christ rides a white horse.⁶⁸⁶ Chevalier and Gheerbrant point out that ‘this whole process of ascension culminates in the figure of the white horse, the steed of heroes, saints and spiritual victors. All great Messianic figures ride such horses.’⁶⁸⁷ While the Stallion in ‘An Cuilithionn’ has no rider and is very much his own master, the idea of the horse being connected to ascension and spiritual heroism is very fitting in relation to the overall message of the poem. In later parts of ‘An Cuilithionn’ figures such as Christ and Prometheus are seen on the peaks of the mountain. In MacLean’s mind the peaks of the mountain are the meeting place for god-like figures whose spiritual heroism and sacrifices give hope to the world. At the beginning of Part V, which describes the Stallion’s main entrance in the poem, the sun in the shape of the red rose of Socialism rises over the land⁶⁸⁸ and this stanza is followed immediately with the description of the appearance of the Stallion on the mountain. Thus, the Stallion can also be associated with the rising sun and the heights of mankind and one of his main functions is to symbolise

⁶⁸⁴ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, pp. 522-523.

⁶⁸⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 98.

⁶⁸⁶ ‘Then I saw heaven open, and there was a white horse. Its rider is called Faithful and True; it is with justice that he judges and fights his battles.’ Revelation 19: 11.

⁶⁸⁷ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 525.

⁶⁸⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

the driving force of the heroism represented by other figures such as Christ, Connolly, Liebknecht, Lenin and Dimitrov. It is interesting that the Stallion has the same force and energy which many of the Soviet posters illustrate. There are even depictions of horses in some of these posters. The example below (Figure 5) is by Nikolai Kupreyanov and its caption reads ‘Citizens! Preserve Historical Monuments’. The monument, with which the artist has chosen to illustrate his country’s heroic past, is a rearing horse and it is taking the same stance as the Stallion in ‘An Cuilithionn’.



Figure 5: Poster by Nikolai Kupreyanov, ‘Citizens! Preserve Historical Monuments’ (1919). Courtesy of <www.internationalposter.com> {consulted 8/7/07}

In another poster from 1919 (Figure 6), horses are also featured.



Figure 6: Poster by B. Zvorkykin, ‘The Struggle of the Red Knight with the Dark Force’ (1919) Courtesy of <www.internationalposter.com> {consulted 8/7/07}

While the horses in this poster from 1919 have riders, the same strength and forceful power can still be seen. I refer to the links between MacLean’s symbolism and Soviet art again in Chapter 6.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have studied the sense of movement and transformation which is inherent in ‘An Cuilithionn’. It is clear that even as early as Part I and II, when MacLean is making his own journey on the Cuillin from peak to peak, that this represents the local scene which radiates outwards to incorporate the wider issues of the poem as time goes on. Time and space are traversed, and this form of movement is mirrored by the Stallion’s journey around the peaks of the mountain in Part V. By this point in the poem the Stallion’s movement symbolises the energy which the world has needed and still needs throughout history if change is to continue and hope is to be kept alive. More light can be shed on this sort of pattern of movement if the symbol of the sea-serpent in Part VII is studied. The serpent coils around the mountain before moving upwards towards the sky and the Stallion also displays this pattern, moving on the mountain peaks and thus retaining a connection to the earth, but

his proud stance keeps him from being tied to the ground. He is striving towards the heavens, which links him fittingly to the theme of striving for the heights in MacDiarmid's poem, 'If there are bounds to any man', which MacLean translates into Gaelic at the end of Part V.

I have ranged widely from the sea-serpent as a symbol used in particular by MacDiarmid to the symbol of the snake in a mythic and literary context. It has been necessary to show the scope and depth of this symbol in order to fully grasp the power of the sea-monster as portrayed in Sorley MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn'. The serpent may only be mentioned briefly in Part VII but its mythic origins give it resonance in modern times. Thus MacDiarmid envisions the snake as the ouroboros which underlies all of human history and MacLean shows awareness of this meaning and adapts the symbol to suit his own poetic ideas; by moving from the ocean to the mountain and striking out at heaven it can be assumed that there is a shift of energy within the poem – in other words, the pattern of history is changing. There is an urgency in this movement; by rearing up vertically to strike, the serpent resembles lightning in reverse. All symbols have the potential to be multi-faceted – MacLean also explores the serpent further in 'Coilltean Ratharsair' and he views it as an image of mystery and threat as well as untapped sexual and creative energy. From a Christian perspective the serpent is the enemy of God; the inclusion of such a symbol in the last part of 'An Cuilithionn' can thus emphasise its apocalyptic nature. It is also tempting to see the serpent as a symbol of Socialism with its direct opposition to the heavens, which is traditionally associated with God. From a psychological perspective the serpent coming out of the deep and coiling around the Cuillin also could be interpreted as an emergence from the unconscious to the conscious mind. In psychological terms it is a symbol with sexual connotations – there is definitely a potent, rising energy that can be strongly sensed in this part of the poem.

This same rising energy is glimpsed in the symbol of the Stallion. Links can be traced between the horse and the serpent in folklore and mythology. In fact, Chevalier and Gheerbrant go as far as to say that the only creature which surpasses the horse in its many-sidedness is the serpent. Both the serpent and the horse manifest life and continuity, journeying from the depths of the earth to the heights and back. Also, both serpent and stallion are associated with the power of sexuality and creativity.⁶⁸⁹ There can be no doubt

⁶⁸⁹ Chevalier and Gheerbrant, 1996, p. 526.

that the Stallion in 'An Cuilithionn' symbolises the rising power of Socialism and MacLean's hopes that this power will spread across Europe. However, the Stallion also represents the pure energy of heroism itself and is one of the most important symbols in the whole poem. The Stallion links the elements of earth and water, but also ascends to the heights, showing that its journey is progressive and is leading towards some sort of heroic achievement. It may be that the symbols in 'An Cuilithionn' in general are heralding an understanding of the poet's own identity. If, as seems likely, the culmination of all MacLean has learned about the world and about himself is shown in the last stages of Part VII, then the specific patterns of movement of the sea-serpent and Stallion from circular to straight and from dormant to alive can be perceived as being signifiers of the true purpose of 'An Cuilithionn'. This purpose will be explored further in the chapters to follow.

Chapter 6

Self-Sacrifice: The End and the New Beginning

Introduction

The feeling of movement which is inherent in ‘An Cuilithionn’ due to symbols such as the Stallion and the sea-serpent highlights the importance of the journey which Sorley MacLean is presenting in the poem. This journey can be described as both literal and figurative since he actually physically experiences the different peaks of the mountain as well as witnessing visions during this process. In this chapter I will study the sense of movement from the perspective of the journey of the hero, which is a vital theme throughout the poem. So far, I have shown how the Stallion undertakes a rebirth from his impotent role as a gelding and channels the rising energy as ‘An Cuilithionn’ progresses. This transformation could be described as a form of death and rebirth - coupled with the pattern of movement on the mountain, it is possible to view MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’ in relation to Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* in which Frye puts forward the idea that within literature there can be glimpsed a mythic narrative code in which the heroic quest is of central importance. The hero must travel through a cycle in which he comes up against conflict and adventures before entering into a stage in which heroism and effective action are absent. He then ‘dies’ in order for a newborn society to rise in triumph, effectively being ‘reborn’ himself.⁶⁹⁰ In previous chapters I have described the sense of cyclical journeying in ‘An Cuilithionn’ but I have also highlighted within the text the ‘straight line’ which exists between the opposite poles of the underworld/earth and the heavens. Northrop Frye also incorporates this pattern into his mythic paradigm.

Because Frye’s theory appears to fit so well with MacLean’s poem it is useful to undertake a fuller study of *Anatomy of Criticism* alongside ‘An Cuilithionn’ in order to broaden understanding of MacLean’s work. MacLean views the self-sacrifice of the hero as a vital component of the role of the hero and his journey towards a sense of totality and wholeness. This theme can be traced back beyond Frye’s literary system to the ideas of James Frazer as

⁶⁹⁰ See Chapter 2 for a fuller description of Northrop Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* and a discussion of the merits of this theory in relation to ‘An Cuilithionn’.

well as the ideals of political figures of the late 19th and early 20th century. This period of history was defined by the Romantic legacy which affected both the literature and the politics of the time - real figures deliberately compared themselves with literary ones and in some specific cases this had a profound effect on the political climate of the period. Later in this chapter I will use the Irish figures such as James Connolly and Patrick Pearse, who MacLean mentions in 'An Cuilithionn', as a case study to explore this theme further. In particular I will focus on the Irish Literary Revival and the subsequent actions taken by the poets and political figures before and after the 1916 Easter Rising. The political and literary climate of Ireland did not escape MacLean's notice and contributed to his views on heroism, Nationalism, and Socialism. The events in Ireland had entered the Scottish psyche and had succeeded in having a potent effect on Scottish poets such as Hugh MacDiarmid.⁶⁹¹ Thus, the Irish situation influenced the early beginnings of the Scottish Renaissance. I am interested in viewing how the deliberate regeneration of the death-rebirth hero myth, in particular the portrayal of Cú Chulainn by W.B. Yeats and other Irish writers, could set in motion a mythic paradigm that would be later taken up by MacLean and invested into his own heroic symbol of the mountain. Up to this point I have mainly concentrated on the personal and psychological perspectives which are present in the poem but I will now expand on this idea to incorporate the overall concept of the journey of the hero. By doing this it is hoped that MacLean's personal and political standpoint will be understood in more detail within a historical, political and literary perspective.

6.1 The Application of Frye's Literary System to 'An Cuilithionn'

6.1.1 The Archetypal Organization of 'An Cuilithionn'

If 'An Cuilithionn' is reduced to its basic components the archetypal organization of the poem will begin to emerge and from that foundational point the symbols can then be studied for more detailed content and meaning. MacLean wrote 'An Cuilithionn' in seven parts and for this reason it is more noticeable that there are 'peaks' of action where the archetypes become more pronounced. It should also be observed that 'An Cuilithionn' is a modernist poem in the same tradition as Eliot's *The Waste Land* and therefore it may be more difficult to pick out one line of action or strand of narrative since one of the main features of modern literature is the multitude of voices that come from one text. If this is taken into account it is possible to see Frye's 'hero' archetype as a variety of figures as opposed to one specific hero

⁶⁹¹ Murray Pittock, *Celtic Britain and the British Image* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 84.

whose identity is consistent throughout the poem.

Part I opens with a ‘voice’ (the poet or ‘hero’) standing on the peak of a mountain. He looks down on the land and observes the oppressed and the oppressors. He also sees some of the heroes of the past and senses the stirring of the dead. The plight of the oppressed people affects the hero physically and mentally – ‘lean an glaodh ud ri mo chlaistneachd,/ dhrùidh e air smior mo neart-sa;’.⁶⁹² In Part II the hero continues his visions and he experiences an initiation with the land. From Part II to Part V the hero enacts an ascent/descent on the mountain, which becomes a form of purgatorial tests and ‘adventures’:

ach mar is àirde théid an òireadh
 ’s ann is doimhne a chù neach
 troimh an ruaimle, troimh a’ chàthar,⁶⁹³

Part V heralds the point where the hero rises (in the form of the Skye Stallion) and transforms into a proper figure of heroism with the rising of the sun (from gelding to Stallion):

Chunnacas manadh mór is uilebheist,
 an t-Aigeach a’ sìtrich air a’ Chuilithionn,
 éirigh nan creagan a bha builgeadh,
 air an tug an spiorad tulgadh.⁶⁹⁴

In Part VI we hear the voices of the land in the form of the Gesto girl and Clio. These voices are the voices of the ‘rescued bride’ in Frye’s mythic model – she is awaiting the coming of heroism. Part VII is the final battle between good and evil. The death and sacrifice of the hero takes place with the tearing of his body:

an cinne-daonna air na creagan
 a’ ceusadh anama fhéin ri sgreadan
 nan eun is nam brùidean fiadhaich
 a fhuair an toirt fhéin on bhiathadh.⁶⁹⁵

Due to his sacrifice there comes the rebirth of hope and the ‘rising’ of the mountain at the very end of the poem – ‘gu treunmhor chithear an Cuilithionn/ ’s e ’g éirigh air taobh eile duilghe.’

⁶⁹² MacLean, 1999, p. 74.

⁶⁹³ MacLean, 1999, p. 92.

⁶⁹⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

⁶⁹⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

6.1.2 Cyclical Movement in ‘An Cuilithionn’

The storyline I have described is one way of interpreting ‘An Cuilithionn’ – there is a central character who undergoes an initiation before transforming and rising up to challenge forces of evil and corruption in order to save the land. A sacrifice must take place and rebirth is then able to occur. All of the archetypes of this mythic paradigm are present in ‘An Cuilithionn’ in some form or another. Different voices or characters may take over in parts of the poem in order for the action to progress within a modernist framework but the general outcome remains the same. The shape this mythic paradigm takes is a circle to represent the cyclical nature of death and rebirth with the apocalyptic and demonic worlds at opposite poles, influencing the cyclical pattern. In *Anatomy of Criticism* Frye is committed to the idea of cycles that manifest themselves in many ways throughout literature. He writes that ‘the fundamental form of process is cyclical movement’⁶⁹⁶ and he provides categories of images which are forms of rotary or cyclical movement.

The first category is the movement of the divine world shown in the disappearance and return of a god or hero. This god can be manifested as an animal or a human and, ‘as a god is almost by definition immortal, it is a regular feature of all such myths that the dying god is reborn as the same person. Hence the mythical or abstract structural principle of the cycle is that the continuum of identity in the individual life from birth to death is extended from death to rebirth.’⁶⁹⁷ This cyclical model is an extremely strong force in MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’ and can be observed as much in the cycles of nature as it is in the human form of the ‘hero’. MacLean’s descriptions of heroic struggles throughout history in the form of figures such as Ernst Thaelmann, Karl Liebknecht, Spartacus, John Maclean and James Connolly are mirrored in the environment and the landscape of the mountains. One of the most obvious manifestations of this is the cycle of the sun, which already has Christian elements of the Son of Man rising from the dead to give light to the world. Frye writes about:

the daily journey of the sun-god across the sky...followed by a mysterious passage through a dark underworld, sometimes conceived as a belly of a devouring mother, back to the starting point. The solstitial cycle of the solar year supplies an extension of the same symbolism, incorporated in our Christian literature. Here there is more emphasis on the theme of a newborn

⁶⁹⁶ Frye, 1957, p. 158.

⁶⁹⁷ Frye, 1957, p. 159.

light threatened by the powers of darkness.⁶⁹⁸

In Part II of ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean repeats the phrase ‘Seo latha eile air na sléibhtean.’⁶⁹⁹ However, although he gives the impression that the sun is coming up each day and time is moving on, there is very little hope of a powerful rebirth in the lines:

Seo latha eile air na sléibhtean
 ’s na Sgitheanaich fhathast gun éirigh;
 seo latha eile air na raointean
 ’s an t-Eilean Mór a’ call a dhaoine;
 seo latha eile breacadh iarmailt
 nach toir sàsachadh do m’iargain;
 seo latha eile bristeadh fàire
 nach fhaic an aoibhneas no an gàire;⁷⁰⁰

To take this point further, the first few parts of the poem are described in especially gloomy, grey terms and MacLean is standing on the Cuillin in the evening – ‘Feasgar dhomh air Sgurra na Banachdaich/ dh’éirich samhlaidhean san anamoch;’.⁷⁰¹ It seems that there must be a descent into darkness, even into the depths of the morass, before the sun can rise in its true power. In cyclical terms of birth, death and rebirth, the morass represents the dark night of the soul:

Tha oidhche na mòintich air mo shùilean
 ’s i air drùdhadh air mo léirsinn;
 chan eil mo dhòchas ri ùr dhreach
 no ri ùr ghile gréine.⁷⁰²

It is clear that the sun is the antithesis of the black ooze of the morass. One of the most important peaks in ‘An Cuilithionn’ is when the wheel turns and there is a rebirth of light. In Part V hope seems to be getting stronger that good will overcome evil:

Fada, ach thig i,
 ’s ann dhuinn thig òr-ghrian;
 éiridh an Cuilithionn
 gu suilbhir ’na ghlòir geal;
 ged is searbh dhuinn an oidhche
 chuir an loinneas fo sgleò dubh,
 ’s ann a bhristeas a’ mhaduinn
 air baidealan glòrmhor.⁷⁰³

⁶⁹⁸ Frye, 1957, p. 159.

⁶⁹⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 82.

⁷⁰⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 82.

⁷⁰¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 70.

⁷⁰² MacLean, 1999, p. 94.

Even when the sun is not mentioned directly in Part VII, the Cuillin rising over the suffering and sorrow of mankind gives the impression of a new day and a new beginning for the people – ‘gu treunmhor chithear an Cuilithionn/ ’s e ’g éirigh air taobh eile duilghe.’⁷⁰⁴

MacLean is aware of the power that the sun cycle can symbolically inspire in ‘An Cuilithionn’ – this cyclical symbol is capable of exceeding the separate areas of politics and religion. In some instances MacLean manages to fuse the symbol of the risen Christ with the ‘rising’ of a more politically orientated symbol:

Chuala mi gum facas bristeadh
agus clisgeadh air an fhàire,
gum facas ròs dearg ùrail
thar saoghal brùite màbte,⁷⁰⁵

MacLean reinforces the idea that death can be spiritual and political when he writes in Part VI:

Seall a-mach, an e ’n là e,
’s mi ri feitheamh na fàire,
’s mi ri coimhead a’ Chuilithinn
gus an tulgadh bhith sàsaicht’;
seall a-mach, an e mhadainn
a tha balladh nan speuran;
agus faic an e ’n ròs dearg
A tha ’g òradh nan sléibhlean?⁷⁰⁶

The image of the red rose of Communism is fused with the image of the rising sun within the same symbolic cycle of death and rebirth.

Like the sun cycle, water can also be seen to mirror the mythic actions in ‘An Cuilithionn’. Northrop Frye writes that ‘water symbolism has also its own cycle, from rains to springs, from springs and fountains to brooks and rivers, from rivers to the sea or the winter snow, and back again.’⁷⁰⁷ Many of the images in ‘An Cuilithionn’ such as the mist, the smirr of rain, the idyllic lochs, the watery bog and the sea could be viewed as being part of a cycle, or at least helps to add to the atmosphere of cyclical change. The storm showers, mist and smirr of

⁷⁰³ MacLean, 1999, p. 102.

⁷⁰⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 130.

⁷⁰⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 96.

⁷⁰⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 116.

⁷⁰⁷ Frye, 1957, p. 160.

rain are mentioned mostly in the first parts of the poem in relation to the past:

Chì mi 'n sàr-eilean 'na shiantan
mar chunnaic Màiri Mhór 'na h-iargain,
's an sgaoileadh ceò bho cheann na Gàrsbheinn
ag èaladh air creachainnean fàsa...⁷⁰⁸

The theme is continued in Part II with the lines – ‘agus an t-Eilean mór 'na shiantan/ mar chunnacas le sùil na h-iargain’.⁷⁰⁹ The landmarks of Skye are blurred with the smirr of rain – ‘Diùirinis, an Srath is Sòghaidh/ anns a’ mhaith chiùran còmhla’⁷¹⁰ – this may be a device employed to separate the land of the present from the past and its ‘Golden Age’. It is as if the land is slumbering and the harsh realities of the present have been softened. However, this turns into something more sinister with the description of the morass of evil in Part III onwards. If the past is evoked with the soft rain then the present state of the world is mirrored by the muddy bog – the ‘Golden Age’ of tradition and song has given way to a period of stagnation:

Tha ioma craobh dhosrach snodhaich
a’ fàs anns a’ bhoglaich choimhich
Is ioma eun treun-sgiathach àlainn
a sheas orra mas deach a bhàthadh;
ach an uair a thig an laomadh
sluigear flùr is eun is craobhan.⁷¹¹

The morass cannot always succeed. In spiritual terms good must attempt to overcome evil and in cyclical terms the movement of water suggests the bog cannot always remain stagnant:

Ciaraidh an latha air a’ mhòintich
ged a tha i oillteil bòrcach
dubhaidh an oidhche air a bruachan,
tuitidh is traoghaidh a ruaimle,
tràghaidh a muir-làn mór bàrcach;⁷¹²

With the arrival of the heroic Stallion the power of the morass recedes:

Chan eil thu tilleadh air an òtraich;
chan eil thu nis 'nad thruaghan gearrain;
chail na boglaichean am mealladh.⁷¹³

⁷⁰⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 66.

⁷⁰⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 78.

⁷¹⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 80.

⁷¹¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 86.

⁷¹² MacLean, 1999, p. 92.

⁷¹³ MacLean, 1999, p. 98.

It is significant that on a number of occasions in ‘An Cuilithionn’ the Stallion is described in ways relating to the sea e.g. ‘Eich mhóir a’ chuain’ and ‘eich mhóir nan tonn.’⁷¹⁴ The sea and the Stallion merge and the cyclical nature of water means that nothing stays stagnant and the surging sea brings with it hope and a sense of rebirth. The land, with its springs and lochs, cannot be completely swallowed up by the morass and the cycle stays in motion.

The last category that Frye deals with is the ‘Spenglerian cycle’⁷¹⁵ and this applies greatly to Sorley MacLean’s poetry. Frye writes:

Poets, like critics, have generally been Spenglerians, in the sense that in poetry, as in Spengler, civilised life is frequently assimilated to the organic cycle of growth, maturity, decline, death and rebirth in another individual form. Themes of a golden or heroic age in the past, of a millennium in the future, of the wheel of fortune in social affairs, of the *ubi sunt* elegy, of meditations over ruins, of nostalgia for a lost pastoral simplicity, of regret or exultation over the collapse of an empire, belong here.⁷¹⁶

The whole of ‘An Cuilithionn’ could be viewed as a meditation on the cyclical nature of mankind and how the landscape interacts with this. It is a constantly changing situation – at the start of the poem the position of many countries within Europe is grim and yet by the end of Part VII we are reminded that heroism still exists and with this realization comes hope. This is not to say that the rebirth of hope means that the cycle can stop and remain motionless. Human nature dictates that there will always be good and evil influences and that they will exist side by side. One of the important messages in ‘An Cuilithionn’ is that all is not lost since the cyclical movement of nature and with it, mankind and its history, means that life is reaffirmed and has the capacity to move and change. Frye mentions the wheel of fortune in *Anatomy of Criticism* and MacLean is also familiar with this image in the form of the wheel of history. In ‘An Cuilithionn’ he writes:

Chunnaic mi ’na chaoir bheò uile
spiorad beadarrach an duine,
anam aigeannach a’ churaidh
eanchainn eagarra nam mullach,
aigne sìor-bhuadhach gun chlaoidh
cridhe geal-ghathach an t-saoi;
cuibhle na h-Eachdraidh a’ dol mun cuairt.⁷¹⁷

⁷¹⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 98.

⁷¹⁵ Oswald Spengler (1880-1936) was a German philosopher of history who wrote *The Decline of the West* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1926, 1928) which argues that civilizations go through natural cycles of growth and decay.

⁷¹⁶ Frye, 1957, p. 160.

The wheel of fortune and history is a motif that was familiar to Gaelic poets of the 18th century – the theme of destiny was prominent in Gaelic panegyric. For example, in ‘Chlann Chatain an t-Sràil’ John Roy Stewart states:

Ach thig cuibhl’ an fhortain mun cuairt
car bho dheas no bho thuath,
'S gheibh ar n-eascaraid duais na h-eucoir.⁷¹⁸

Perhaps it is this belief in destiny that allows MacLean to write in a heartfelt way about situations such as the Clearances while maintaining a belief that certain ‘empires’ will collapse. In Part VI MacLean gives a voice to the Gesto girl who mourns the loss of her homeland and her family:

Saothair, acras, fannachd, tàmailt,
b’iadsan a’ chuibhrionn a bha ’n dàn dhomh;
agus a chaoidh cha ruig mi fàire
om faic mi Loch Harport ’s taigh mo mhàthar
far an robh cridhealas is gàire
aig luaidhean ri linn mo chàirdean;⁷¹⁹

MacLean is saddened by the loss of this ‘pastoral idyll’ but he is also quick to prophesy the collapse and destruction of the people whom he viewed as responsible for the Clearances –

Chì mi Caisteal Dhun-Bheagain
'na aon chaoir lasair frainich,
agus an aitreabh mhór Shléiteach
fo bhàrr-gùc, tùir is stéidhean.⁷²⁰

MacLean is showing an awareness of the balance of nature since where there are oppressors there may also be heroes ready to emerge to challenge conditions. This is nowhere more pronounced than in the Clio section of Part VI – a balance exists between villains and the oppressed people and the heroes who have emerged to alter the situations in certain ways:

'S mise Clio na h-Eireann:
a Dhia, fhuair mise mo léireadh
le gort Bliadhna Bhuntàta,
le fòirneart, bochdainn is ànradh;
ach a dh’aindeoin na truaighe
's mise Chlio mhór uallach,
oir chunnaic mi O Conghaile ’s am Pìarsach,
Wolfe Tone, MacGe[a]railt agus Emmet.⁷²¹

⁷¹⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 116.

⁷¹⁸ Black, 2001, pp. 164-173.

⁷¹⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 106.

⁷²⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 68.

⁷²¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 112.

These lines are also reminiscent of poems such as ‘Òran nam Fineachan’ by Iain Dubh mac Iain mhic Ailein,⁷²² which was composed in 1715 and evokes the tradition of the bardic eulogy of heroes.

The theme of a golden or heroic age that is mentioned by Frye is also of central importance to MacLean’s poetry in relation to the death and rebirth of heroes. He mentions historical figures in ‘An Cuilithionn’ and many of these men died for their causes such as James Connolly, Ernst Thaelmann, Karl Liebknecht and Spartacus. One of the underlying questions in the poem is who will stand beside them and take their place when these heroes fall? A ‘Golden Age’ dictates that the successors of that age will find it difficult to follow such greatness. MacLean’s references to Màiri Mhór, who is synonymous with honour and courage in the eyes of the poet, add to the elegiac tone and longing for a lost time:

agus thàinig Màiri Mhór
thoirt iomraidh air gnìomh MhicLeòid.⁷²³

MacLean places the plight of mankind in front of the reader and emphasises the need for new heroism in the face of such oppression:

thar truaighe, eu-dòchais, gamhlas, cuilbheart,
thar ciont is truaillidheachd, gu furachair,
gu treunmhor chithear an Cuilithionn
's e 'g éirigh air taobh eile duilghe.⁷²⁴

It should be remembered that at the time of writing in the late 1930s MacLean would have been desperately seeking the meaning of heroism for the modern age with its threat of fascism and would have been looking into the past for answers. He would also have been well aware of the growth and fall of states and economies after the First World War and the idea of the natural cycle of the landscape coinciding with mankind’s cycles may have been comforting in that it naturalised the situations that were being experienced at this difficult time in history. The Cuillin symbolises all of the heroism that mankind has the potential to exert and although MacLean’s heroes of the past such as Connolly, MacLean and MacPherson cannot rise again, he hopes that new heroes will appear and a rebirth will take place. The heroes of the past may not physically return but the eternal spirit of heroism will remain. Thus, the Spenglerian cycle of growth, decline, death and rebirth is demonstrated by

⁷²² Black, 2001, pp. 38-47.

⁷²³ MacLean, 1999, p. 70.

⁷²⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 130.

MacLean in his treatment of the oppressors, heroes and the rise and fall of cultures and states in ‘An Cuilithionn.

6.1.3 Demonic and Apocalyptic Imagery in ‘An Cuilithionn’

Now that I have established the sense of cyclical movement in ‘An Cuilithionn’ I will look in some detail at the opposite poles of the demonic and the apocalyptic that Frye describes and I will assess the extent to which these correspond with the imagery in MacLean’s poem.

6.1.3.1 *The Demonic World*

In *Anatomy of Criticism* the demonic world is connected with a diminution of the individual, the contrast between pleasure and duty, a sense of bondage and oppression, and the figure of the sacrificial victim or scapegoat.⁷²⁵ In ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean seems to lose a sense of identity as the morass seeps further into his psyche – this could be described as a breakdown of individuality and therefore the morass is best placed in the category of demonic imagery:

Cus dhen bhoglaich na mo spiorad,
cus dhen mhòintich na mo chridhe,
cus dhen ruaimle na mo bhuadhan:
ghabh mo mhisneachd an tuar glas.⁷²⁶

The morass is also synonymous with bondage and oppression – this theme runs the whole way through the poem and results in many ‘demonic’ symbols such as the ghosts and bourgeois oppressors who appear to rise up from the bog to celebrate their capitalist victories:

Och, a mhòinteach Mararabhlainn,
's ann dhutsa bu dual na taibhsean,
....
A chlanna nan uachdaran ceannsail,
dannaibh anns a’ bhoglaich aingidh,
thigibh gu spòrsa air na bruachan,
chan fhada bhios sibh fhéin an uachdar.⁷²⁷

The bog is a living entity made up of the history of oppression. It indiscriminately sucks people down into its depths – in this nightmarish world the oppressors are eventually pulled down into the bog alongside the people that they have exploited, which is an image that perfectly fits into the demonic category since there are no real winners within a capitalist

⁷²⁵ Frye, 1957, p. 147.

⁷²⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 94.

⁷²⁷ MacLean, 1999, pp. 84-86.

system that depends on tyrant-leaders and subjugated masses. Some of the most frightening visions which MacLean experiences are of the lords, landowners and factors sitting on peaks of the Cuillin. They are images of the demonic and the fact that many of them have risen from the dead adds to the nightmarish vision:

Thòisich na Tannasgan air dannsa,
's cha b' e siod an iomairt sheannsail,
corrach an t-sluaigh a' fàgail
an ceann gliongarsaich nan àrman. ⁷²⁸

The demonic is not just manifested in human form; it is also present in the animal world. Frye summarises this idea in his essay on the theory of myths:

The animal world is portrayed in terms of monsters or beasts of prey. The wolf, the traditional enemy of the sheep, the tiger, the vulture, the cold and earth-bound serpent, and the dragon are all common...The dragon is especially appropriate because it is not only monstrous and sinister but fabulous, and so represents the paradoxical nature of evil as a moral fact and an eternal negation. In the Apocalypse the dragon is called "the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."⁷²⁹

Birds symbolising death and decay are mentioned frequently in 'An Cuilithionn'. In Part I the landowners are portrayed as crows, looking down at the destruction they have caused to the land in the form of the Clearances. They are sinister and silent presences within the landscape:

gurrach feannaig air gach dùn ann,
feannagan dubha boga claona,
ar leò gur iolaire gach aon dhiùbh. ⁷³⁰

By Part VII birds of prey form a major part of the demonic imagery. MacLean provides examples of the suffering of heroes such as Prometheus being devoured by vultures and likens it to mankind being consumed by the 'birds' of oppression:

an cinne-daonna air na creagan
a' ceusadh anama fhéin ri sgreadan
nan eun is nam brùidean fiadhaich
a fhuair an toirt fhéin on bhiathadh. ⁷³¹

MacLean develops the demonic imagery of the vultures by connecting it to his 'love'.

⁷²⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 72.

⁷²⁹ Frye, 1957, p. 149.

⁷³⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 66.

⁷³¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

During the composition of ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean was still engaged in the writing of *Dàin do Eimhir*, his collection of love poems to his muse figure, Eimhir. One of the main themes of these poems is the difficult choice MacLean must make between love and his sense of political duty in the face of fascism and in particular, the Spanish Civil War. It is hinted at in Dàin VIII that ‘Eimhir’ does not hold the same politics as MacLean. He writes:

Ach thuig mi gum b’ fhaoin do smuain-sa
nuair chunnaic mi an Diluain sin
lem shùilean fhìn an clogad stàilinn
air ceann àlainn mo luaidhe.⁷³²

The helmet here may symbolise ‘Eimhir’s’ potential for political betrayal in the eyes of MacLean and adds further weight to the divide between MacLean’s political duty and his love of a woman.⁷³³ In this dilemma lies the seed of demonic imagery since Frye states that a contrast between pleasure and duty is the theme within the demonic human world.⁷³⁴

MacLean’s love becomes a vulture because she hears the ‘melody of the birds’ and is drawn towards their politics of oppression, thus ‘holing’ MacLean’s body when she becomes interested in the very thing he is fighting against⁷³⁵ – she wounds him personally and politically. This passage in the poem is doubly demonic if Frye’s theories are followed since not only does it fit into the category of the animal world but it also coincides with Frye’s erotic dimension of the demonic. Frye writes that ‘the demonic erotic relation becomes a fierce destructive passion that works against loyalty or frustrates the one who possesses it.’⁷³⁶ MacLean’s love takes the form of a siren since she goes with him onto the mountain and turns on him while they are there together.⁷³⁷

The dragon, which Frye mentions in his study, is also present in Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’:

Thogadh as a’ mhuir an uilebheist
’s chuireadh i air àird a’ Chuilithinn;
bha i cearclach an àm ruagaidh
a-mach á doimhne nan cuantan,
ach a nise tha i dìreach

⁷³² MacLean, 1999, p. 10.

⁷³³ This interpretation is Whyte’s. For more comments on Dàin VIII see Whyte, 2002, pp. 175-176.

⁷³⁴ Frye, 1957, p. 147.

⁷³⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

⁷³⁶ Frye, 1957, p. 149.

⁷³⁷ Another reading of the vulture image could involve linking it to the violent images in *Dàin do Eimhir* associated with the Scottish Eimhir. At the time of writing Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn, MacLean was thrown into emotional turmoil after receiving a letter from the Scottish girl explaining why the relationship could not develop further. See Whyte, 2002, pp. 13-14.

a' leum ri gaoith an aghaidh sine;
 chunnacas an nathair a' leumraich
 is aodann nèimh air a bheumadh.⁷³⁸

The sea serpent in 'An Cuilithionn' fits well with Frye's description of the image of the monster in *Anatomy of Criticism*, in which the boundaries of the nature of evil are widened into the fantastical.⁷³⁹ I have already mentioned in Chapter 4 that MacLean's vision of the creature of the sea has a likeness to Leviathan, the Biblical sea monster identified with social tyrannies, and like Leviathan, MacLean's sea monster is a direct challenger of heaven.⁷⁴⁰ The setting of 'An Cuilithionn' also has demonic connotations. Like T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, the landscape in MacLean's poem is in many parts that of a wasteland, ravished by the history of wrongs such as the Clearances. The encroaching morass, which threatens to swallow up even the mountains, is perhaps closest to Frye's definition of the demonic within the landscape. In his outline of the demonic aspects of literature Frye writes that 'the world of water is the water of death, often identified with spilled blood, as in the Passion and in Dante's symbolic figure of history...'⁷⁴¹ When MacLean addresses the morass in Part III – 'Och, a bhoglaichean fuilteach,/ Cò idir a stadas ur tuiltean?'⁷⁴² – he is acknowledging the death-like properties of the encroaching bog since the mixture of water and the blood of the people is a powerful image. The morass is the symbol that provides most of the demonic images in 'An Cuilithionn'. Everything about it is sinister and threatening. MacLean also writes about the will-o-the-wisp in relation to the morass:

Tha solus-biorach air a' mhòintich
 's chan eil 'na mhanadh an sòlas
 ach casgairt, gort is mort is dòlas,
 bristeadh cridhe 's bàs an dòchais.⁷⁴³

According to Frye's category of demonic images, 'the world of fire is a world of malignant demons like the will-o-the-wisp, or spirits broken from hell':⁷⁴⁴

So far I have dealt with the natural landscape of 'An Cuilithionn' but Frye also mentions the 'inorganic' world of the towns and cities in his discussion of demonic imagery⁷⁴⁵ and

⁷³⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

⁷³⁹ Frye, 1957, p. 149.

⁷⁴⁰ See Chapter 4 for further development of this motif.

⁷⁴¹ Frye, 1957, p. 150.

⁷⁴² MacLean, 1999, p. 84.

⁷⁴³ MacLean, 1999, pp. 82-84.

⁷⁴⁴ Frye, 1957, p. 150.

⁷⁴⁵ Frye, 1957, p. 150.

MacLean includes this world in his poem also. These areas, far removed from the natural landscape, are portrayed in ‘An Cuilithionn’ as places connected with the oppressed – they are symbols of the breakdown of the traditional way of life for the Gaels since many people moved there in search of work during and after the Clearances. It is no coincidence that T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* deals with the symbol of the city as a place of corruption, filth and decay – the ‘waste land’ of the metropolis is the symbol of broken-down modern life.⁷⁴⁶ MacLean paints a bleak picture of city life, which could certainly be described as ‘a place which desire totally rejects’⁷⁴⁷ – it is massively unappealing in Part IV:

Chunnacas air sràidean Glaschu
agus air sràidean Dhun-éideann
agus air sràidean Lunnainn,
tiùrr lobhte na bréine:
a’ bhochdainn, an t-acras, an t-siùrsachd,
an fhiabhrais, a’ chaitheamh ’s gach éisleán,
dh’fhàs iad uile air a taobh-se:
rinn i laomadh le creuchdan.⁷⁴⁸

I have already described in my discussion on methodology the theories of James Frazer and his ideas on the ritual killing of the divine king as sacrificial victim who has to be killed in order to give strength to others. It is clear that Frye is influenced by Frazer’s theories when he states that whatever the killing of the divine king may mean in anthropology, it is ‘in literary criticism the demonic...form of tragic and ironic structures.’⁷⁴⁹ The cycle of the year can be viewed as demonic in the sense that there is no beginning and no end and thus no definitive conclusion such as a heavenly paradise can be reached. The killing of the divine king who represents the collective ego of his followers enables the cycle to continue and is thus an image that can be viewed as demonic despite the heroism inherent in this act since there comes with the sacrifice a loss of the individual at the hands of the group. Although I will study the sacrificial victim in more detail in a later section (see 6.2 p. 195 below), it is important to establish it as an important image in ‘An Cuilithionn’ at this stage. There are descriptions of Christ who is the ultimate sacrificial victim as well as Prometheus who suffered at the hands of Jupiter/J Zeus in classical myth:

’S ioma car a chuir an saoghal
on chunnaic Aeschylus aogas
suinn-dé-duine crochte màbte

⁷⁴⁶ Coupe, 1997, p. 32.

⁷⁴⁷ Frye, 1957, p. 147.

⁷⁴⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 94.

⁷⁴⁹ Frye, 1957, p. 148.

air Caucasus nan sgorra ghaidh:

....

Chrochadh Crìosda air crois-ceusaidh
agus Spartacus le cheudan;
bha ioma biatach dé am Breatainn
a rinn an obair oillteil sgreataidh,
agus cheusadh ioma Crìosda
an uiridh agus am bliadhna.⁷⁵⁰

Frye explains that the reason the sacrificial victim is placed in the category of nightmarish imagery is that if it is incorporated into the yearly cycle it corresponds with tragedy – catastrophe can be in either triumph or defeat but what follows is *Sparagmos* or the ‘tearing of the hero’,⁷⁵¹ which MacLean alludes to above. There comes the sense that heroism and effective action are foredoomed and ineffective and thus confusion and anarchy take over. What comes next is the rising of the newborn hero but until that point in the cycle the sacrificial victim is viewed as a tragic image because of the confusion resulting from his temporary disappearance. A good example of this is the confusion and despair experienced by Christ’s followers when he was crucified. This stage had to be experienced in order for rebirth, the next part of the cycle, to be effective.

6.1.3.2 Apocalyptic Imagery

Northrop Frye’s concept of apocalyptic imagery as being the imagery of desire and of endless possibility is manifested in MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’ in the message of hope at the end of the poem. It could be stated that the poem is organised in such a way as to achieve this message of hope at the end as a climax and to show that beyond the demonic imagery there lies a way to salvation. Frye views the apocalyptic imagery of the Bible as being united by Christ – Christ is one God and one Man, the Lamb of God, the tree of life and the rebuilt temple, which is identical with Christ’s risen body.⁷⁵² In Christian thought, Christ and the everlasting life He offers are what humans desire and in medieval literature the apocalyptic imagery is straightforward and leads directly to Biblical themes since at that time Christianity was at the forefront of philosophical thought.⁷⁵³ In modern poetry this human desire and hope for salvation still exists, although it may be more metaphorical. Even in Marxist thought the oppression of the world must be transcended in favour of a newborn society of equality and

⁷⁵⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

⁷⁵¹ Frye, 1957, p. 192.

⁷⁵² Frye, 1957, p. 141.

⁷⁵³ Frye, 1957, p. 142.

so there is very little difference in at least the pattern of Christian and Socialist views. Many Marxist writers such as Louis Althusser denied the theory that within certain historical texts or events there is a more fundamental narrative present. For this reason, many Socialists were wary of what they saw as Christian ideology but there are other Marxist theorists, such as Fredric Jameson, who view a single great collective story such as the Christian journey from Eden to the New Jerusalem as being akin to their own ‘secular scripture’ of the journey from primitive to mature Communism.⁷⁵⁴ Thus, MacLean’s message in ‘An Cuilithionn’ can be a Socialist one while still retaining an underlying apocalyptic-Christian pattern. In the last stanza of the poem MacLean exhibits an unfulfilled spiritual longing and there is the hope that one day this longing will be satisfied:

Có seo, có seo oidhche chridhe?
 Chan eil ach an nì do-ruighinn,
 an samhla a chunnaic an t-anam,
 Cuilithionn ag éirigh thar mara.

Có seo, có seo oidhche ’n anama
 a’ leantainn fiaradh an leòis fhalbhaich?
 Chan eil, chan eil ach am falbhan
 a’ sireadh a’ Chuilithinn thar fairge.⁷⁵⁵

There is a sense of unity and harmony in apocalyptic imagery, which demonic imagery rejects in favour of the oppression of the individual. In apocalyptic imagery the natural world is connected to the human world and Frye writes that ‘identification of gods with animals or plants and of those again with human society form the basis of totemic symbolism.’⁷⁵⁶ This idea comes across clearly in MacLean’s symbol of the Stallion, who turns from a gelding into a powerful animal:

Siod ort fhéin, Aigich lùthmhoir,
 prannaigh tu bùirdeasachd nam fùidsean,
 nì thu sìnteag thar na mointich;
 chan eil thu tuilleadh air an òtraich:
 chan eil thu nis ’nad thruaghan gearrain;
 chaill na boglaichean am mealladh.⁷⁵⁷

The Stallion rises above the oppression already described in Part I, II and III and although this symbol of heroism and strength is not human, there is the feeling that the Stallion is inextricably linked with the human situation and is as much a reflection of the need for heroism as the human heroes who are mentioned in the poem. Other ‘totemic animals’ are

⁷⁵⁴ Coupe, 1997, 174.

⁷⁵⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 128.

⁷⁵⁶ Frye, 1957, p. 144.

⁷⁵⁷ MacLean, 1999, pp. 96-98.

used to describe the Cuillin and can be viewed in terms of the heroic traits that they symbolise and that MacLean would like to invest in the Cuillin and, by extension, all of mankind:

Chithear an Cuilithionn
 'na iolair iomaluath,
 'na leómhann suilbhir,
 'na bheithir dheirg;⁷⁵⁸

The connections between the human body and the vegetable world continue the apocalyptic idea that all of mankind is in communion with the natural world. Frye suggests that this manifests itself in the archetype of Arcadian imagery, which appears in 'An Cuilithionn' in the form of the surroundings the girl from Gesto has been forced to leave. She mourns the loss of this idyllic country:

agus a chaidh cha ruig mi fàire
 om faic mi Loch Harport 's taigh mo mhàthar
 far an robh cridhealas is gàire
 aig luaidhean ri linn mo chàirdean;
 agus chan fhaic mi an Cuilithionn cràcach
 ag éirigh thar Minginis mo shàth-ghaoil.⁷⁵⁹

The idyllic land described by the Gesto girl is classed as apocalyptic imagery because it is what is desired most by those oppressed people who have lost it. It becomes akin to a heavenly paradise in which hope dwells. The theme of desire for the landscape is a potent one in relation to the Gaels, who have been separated from the land of their birth due to the Clearances.⁷⁶⁰ Their way of life on the land and their dependence on it provided them with a strong bond, which was only broken with the coming of industrialisation and the Clearances.

Other 'vegetable' images are present in 'An Cuilithionn' and could be described in apocalyptic terms due to their meaning of hope. MacLean alludes to the red banner of Communism being seen as a sign in the sky in the form of a beautiful sunset and a rose. In the Clio section of Part VI he writes:

ach chunnaic mi ròs dearg Chluaidh a' sgaoileadh
 'na bhrat cumhachdach mór feirge

⁷⁵⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 100.

⁷⁵⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 106.

⁷⁶⁰ Màiri Mhór's 'Nuair bha mi òg' is a good example of this feeling in poetic form. See Meek, 2003, pp. 20-23.

's MacGill-Eain a' togail meirghe.⁷⁶¹

In the same section he makes reference to the rose above the mountain again:

seall a-mach, an e mhadainn
a tha balladh nan speuran;
agus faic an e 'n ròs dearg
a tha 'g òradh nan sléibhlean?⁷⁶²

MacLean's symbols are multi-faceted and it is unlikely that he is only playing out the mythic pattern of Socialist thought in this stanza. On another level the rose has religious connotations in literature. Frye writes:

In the west the rose has a traditional priority among apocalyptic flowers: the use of the rose as a communion symbol in the *Paradiso* comes readily to mind, and in the first book of *The Faerie Queene* the emblem of St George, a red cross on a white ground, is connected not only with the risen body of Christ and the sacramental symbolism which accompanies it, but with the union of the red and white roses in the Tudor dynasty.⁷⁶³

The symbol of the rose can thus be taken further than mere political sloganeering in 'An Cuilithionn' and it is clear that MacLean is aware of the potential of this symbol when, on the subject of his poems, he writes in *Dàin do Eimhir XXVIII*:

Falbhaidh iad 'nan ròs air sléibhlean
far bheil grian nam bard ag éirigh.⁷⁶⁴

The rose symbolises a sense of transcendence for MacLean and his poetry, which comes from the literary image of the rose as transcendent communion symbol, which Frye discusses in *Anatomy of Criticism*.⁷⁶⁵ The theme of the rose is continued in Part VII of the poem:

Ròs dubh a' Chuilithinn ghuinich
dearg le fuil cridhe 'n duine;
ròs ciar na h-eanchainne glaise
dearg le tuar na fala braise;
ròs geal tuigse nan saoi
dearg leis an fhuil gun chlaoidh;
ròs dearg misneachd nan laoch
thar mullach shléibhlean 'na chaoir.⁷⁶⁶

The red rose is viewed as sacred by MacLean in this passage because it figuratively contains

⁷⁶¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 112.

⁷⁶² MacLean, 1999, p. 116.

⁷⁶³ Frye, 1957, p. 144.

⁷⁶⁴ Whyte, 2002, p. 83.

⁷⁶⁵ Frye, 1957, p. 144.

⁷⁶⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 126.

the blood of mankind in its different guises, whether that is in the form of mankind's intellect, heart or spirit. The blood of the rose is what gives life and hope to mankind and it symbolises man's communion with life itself.⁷⁶⁷

6.1.4 Central Concepts in the Structure of 'An Cuilithionn'

So far I have established that the two central concepts in Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* are polarity and cycle. The polar opposites are heaven (apocalyptic) and hell (demonic) and they can be glimpsed in 'An Cuilithionn' as images within the landscape. The polarity present in 'An Cuilithionn' is not the same as duality since duality divides opposites and there is no way of moving between the two. In contrast, polarity means opposites can only exist with their complement.⁷⁶⁸ Thus a unity is formed when opposites exist together and this is what takes place in both Frye's theories and MacLean's poem. The apocalyptic imagery of the Stallion and the 'walker' on the Cuillin at the very end of the poem can only fully represent hope and possibility to the extent that it does when the demonic nature of the morass is fully grasped. Ultimate hope counteracts and complements utter despair and these polar opposites are forever pushing and pulling against each other.

The structure of 'An Cuilithionn' is affected by the cyclical principle, which Frye discusses at length in *Anatomy of Criticism*. The central 'voice' of the poem goes through rites of passage and initiations during his interaction with the landscape. Like the events in history that are mentioned in 'An Cuilithionn', life moves in circles or spirals as opposed to straight lines according to Frye's theory. Where civilisations and movements die away, others take their place and heroism rises and falls with the cyclical movement of nations. Likewise, the individual's life moves with this historical cycle – the pattern could be described as that of concentric circles. The 'rite of passage', which MacLean demonstrates in Part I and II in relation to the climbing of the Cuillin is almost akin to a loss of innocence since the problems inherent in the world are highlighted when the top of the mountain is reached. The hardships

⁷⁶⁷ In this section I have interpreted the symbol of the rose specifically in the light of Northrop Frye's theory of apocalyptic imagery in *Anatomy of Criticism*. However, the rose deserves more attention in relation to its meaning and influence on MacLean and this will be dealt with later in this chapter when I focus on the dying and reviving god motif in Irish Renaissance poetry.

⁷⁶⁸ The ideas on polarity and duality are considered in Sabine Volk-Birke's study of cycles in modern Arthurian fiction in which she employs some of Frye's theories from *Anatomy of Criticism*. Although the subject of her article has no relevance to Gaelic poetry her ideas on narrative structures and the way in which she applies them are useful to my study. See Sabine Volk-Birke, 'The Cyclical Way of the Priestess: On the Significance of Narrative Structures in Marion Zimmer Bradley's *The Mists of Avalon*'. *Anglia*. 108. 3-4 (1990) 409-428.

of mankind in the form of visions and a metaphorical descent of the mountain are subsequently shown in the poem. Thus MacLean is presenting the reader with a route from innocence to ‘adulthood’ and to a major change of consciousness and a realisation that local experience is interconnected with the affairs of the rest of the world. Once this has taken place a more developed understanding of spiritual hope and the regeneration of the potential of mankind can be glimpsed at the end of ‘An Cuilithionn’. It could be stated that MacLean is offering the reader a chance of an epiphany. A mountain-top is a common setting for this moment of enlightenment – according to Frye the symbolic presentation of the point at which the undisplaced apocalyptic world and the cyclical world of nature become aligned often takes place in literature on a mountain-top, an island, a tower, ladder or staircase.⁷⁶⁹

When the concepts of polarity and cyclical movement are taken into consideration it is worth considering the place of myth in MacLean’s ‘An Cuilithionn’. MacLean pays close attention to details of historical importance in his poem but I would suggest that ‘An Cuilithionn’ is as much embedded in the mythical as it is in the historical. Despite there being a multitude of figures which can be linked to historical time MacLean’s underlying structure of phases, cycles, and life-changing moments give the symbol of the mountain, and by extension the whole poem, a strong mythical dimension. MacLean mentions many Gaelic figures such as Donald MacCallum, John MacPherson and Màiri Mhór and the reader is certainly in no doubt of his understanding and awareness of Gaelic history. However, the fact that so many of these characters and events are placed together regardless of their place in linear time means that the mythic takes over. Linear historical occurrences give way to the cyclical where there is no definite beginning and end but instead an ongoing process in which people are grouped according to their heroic actions as opposed to their place in historical time. Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* strives to show that the mythic is never far from the surface of literature and in the case of ‘An Cuilithionn’ this theoretical structure adds a new dimension of understanding to the poem.

6.2 The Mythic Hero in Irish Literature: Blood Sacrifice and Regeneration

Throughout ‘An Cuilithionn’ Sorley MacLean emphasises his own homeland and the significant events that have shaped its history and its people. Nevertheless, he makes it clear

⁷⁶⁹ Frye, 1957, p. 203.

that his vision of heroism reaches beyond his own native Gaelic culture and is a universal presence throughout time and space. In his poem he names Dimitrov, Liebknecht, Spartacus and Lenin among many others and while all of these figures are of great importance to the overall message of 'An Cuilithionn', the Irish heroic figures that he mentions are perhaps the closest to his own Scottish Gaelic cultural traditions and MacLean would have also come into contact with them through Irish literature that he would have been exposed to in the Celtic Department at university. These references are perhaps not in themselves enough to prove any significant Irish influence on MacLean's work but when it is taken into consideration that MacLean's collection of love poems, *Dàin do Eimhir*,⁷⁷⁰ is addressed to Cú Chulainn's wife as a representation of MacLean's own personal love, and that in later years he wrote 'Ard-Mhusaeum na h-Eireann'⁷⁷¹ in honour of James Connolly and 'Aig Uaigh Yeats'⁷⁷² as an address to W.B. Yeats, the connection between MacLean's poetry and possible Irish influences become less tenuous. In a diary entry on 2nd October 1932 (see above, p. 22) MacLean recounts an informal meeting between Dr Black and his students at the University of Edinburgh. MacLean writes that they spent time discussing many subjects and aired their opinions 'on the Scottish vernacular dictionary, on the Irish Free State, on the Catholic Church, on Soviet Russia, and Russian literature...'⁷⁷³ In 1935 George Davie wrote a letter to MacLean concerning MacLean's poetry, encouraging him with the words 'at least you have men like Macmhaighstir Alasdair behind you and the Irish successes before your eyes.'⁷⁷⁴ Thus it can be assumed that MacLean and his friends were aware of Ireland and its literary and political progress. According to James Caird both MacLean and himself were 'affected by the myths of 1916 and 1917 and were both interested in and sympathetic to Irish nationalism'. He states that 'Pearse and Connolly played a prominent part' in their discussions. He goes on to write that 'It is appropriate that in later life Sorley should have been honoured by the National University of Ireland'.⁷⁷⁵

So far in this chapter I have examined the idea of myth as narrative structure within modern

⁷⁷⁰ Whyte, 2002.

⁷⁷¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 258.

⁷⁷² MacLean, 1999, p. 260.

⁷⁷³ MS 29621, pp. 29-30, NLS.

⁷⁷⁴ MS 29501, p. 2, NLS.

⁷⁷⁵ Caird, 1986, p. 40.

poetry and I now intend to take these ideas put forward by Northrop Frye a stage further by studying them in the light of events in Ireland in the early twentieth century which are alluded to in 'An Cuilithionn'. It is recognised that there was a mythic dimension present before, during and after the Easter Rising in both the literature of the Irish Renaissance and in the deliberate actions of the political figures themselves. At the beginning of the twentieth century mythic figures such as Cú Chulainn and Fionn Mac Cumhaill were familiar in the literature of both Ireland and Scotland and, more importantly, began to exert an effect on the cultural politics of the period⁷⁷⁶ - nowhere is this more noticeable than in Ireland around the time of the Easter Rising.

There are three main ways in which MacLean shows an awareness of the Irish literary dimension in 'An Cuilithionn' - he directly names Irish figures who he feels have played their part in the recent heroic past; he alludes to Celtic mythic heroes who are part of the traditional heroic 'history' of Ireland and he frequently uses the symbol of the rose which is also a strong motif in the poetry of W.B. Yeats and Irish symbolic language in general. The latter example of the rose may be more subtle than the actual names of Irish heroes but I intend to make the case that it is the symbol of the rose which binds all of this imagery together in 'An Cuilithionn'. As I examine the Irish symbolism present in the poem it will become apparent that at the centre of it there lies a very strong theme of sacrifice, death and rebirth which is in keeping with the mythic cyclical model that I have already discussed in this chapter in relation to 'An Cuilithionn' and Northrop Frye's theories - the evidence leading towards the death-rebirth model in 'An Cuilithionn' is too substantial to be simply coincidental and the Irish mythic paradigm is a major factor in this. Early twentieth-century Ireland, with its mingling of Nationalism and Socialism, could not fail to be of interest to MacLean and while it is clear in 'An Cuilithionn' that MacLean's greatest interest lies in his Socialist vision, it will nevertheless be useful to examine the interplay between Socialism and Nationalism, especially in the light of Frye's mythic model since these belief systems and ideologies were not completely separate entities at this point in the twentieth century. It may be the case that poetry and drama had parts to play in the mingling of these ideas and I will explore this point further. MacLean's mention of Irish heroes and mythic figures in 'An Cuilithionn' may suggest that by the 1930s James Connolly and Patrick Pearse had become symbols that were too strong to be ignored by the poet, especially with MacLean's

⁷⁷⁶ Pittock, 1999, pp. 15-16.

background of heroic Gaelic chiefs and the traditional role of the bard in praising brave men. By the 1930s events such as the Easter Rising were at enough of a distance in place and time for MacLean to survey them in a historical as well as literary and mythic sense. The main question which will underlie the remainder of this chapter is whether a Nationalist-Romantic mythic paradigm such as the one which can be used to describe what happened in early twentieth century Ireland can ever significantly contribute to a poem such as ‘An Cuilithionn’ which has such a strong Socialist viewpoint. The conclusions which will be drawn may influence the way in which I go on to assess MacLean’s political perspective in the 1930s within the literary context of ‘An Cuilithionn’.

6.2.1 Wider Concepts of Sacrifice in History and Literature

Before I study specific Irish literary examples of heroic sacrifice it is also important to bear in mind that the tragic hero can be viewed on a larger scale. In *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*, Terry Eagleton considers human heroism throughout literature and history and looks at the various definitions of tragedy and sacrifice. He comes to the conclusion that tragedy is sometimes only truly appealing when it is portrayed at a safe distance in literature.⁷⁷⁷ W.B. Yeats wrote in his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* that ‘In all the great tragedies, tragedy is a joy to the man who dies’⁷⁷⁸ while the critic D.D. Raphael believes that tragedy ‘shows the sublimity of human effort’ and the playwright, Eugene O’Neill, states ‘the tragedy of Man is perhaps the only significant thing about him...the individual life is made significant just by the struggle.’ The classicist Gilbert Murray writes that tragedy ‘attests the triumph of the human soul over suffering and disaster’.⁷⁷⁹ Eagleton suggests that the hero dying for the common good of the collective people with all of the connotations of renewal of life does not necessarily symbolise a cynically recuperative gesture – ‘it also represents a political hope and a sense of continuing collective life, a capacity of faith even at the darkest of historical moments, which transcends any mere individualist fixation on the protagonist.’⁷⁸⁰ This is an important point in relation to MacLean’s overall vision in ‘An Cuilithionn’ with its emphasis on heroism and sacrifice for the greater good of mankind. However, Eagleton is quick to stress that the real-life victims of tragedy are far less likely to see it as the one thing

⁷⁷⁷ Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) p. 23.

⁷⁷⁸ Eagleton, 2003, p. 24.

⁷⁷⁹ Eagleton, 2003, p. 25.

⁷⁸⁰ Eagleton, 2003, p. 27.

that brings all of fragmented life together to form a structured whole. He searches for middle ground on which these definitions can exist on some level together:

There is a difference between the belief that suffering is precious in itself, and the view that, though pain is generally to be avoided as an evil, there are kinds of affliction in which loss and gain go curiously together. It is around this aporetic point, at which dispossession begins to blur into power, blindness into insight, and victimage into victory, that a good deal of tragedy turns. So does much revolutionary politics.⁷⁸¹

In 'An Cuilithionn' MacLean does not go as far as to exalt tragedy at the expense of suffering. Passages dealing with experiences such as that of the Gesto girl⁷⁸² show suffering in detail and he emphasises the pointlessness of suffering in different periods of Highland history. He is a poet with a social conscience and he does not romanticise human tragedy to the point of it being rendered emotionless and empty. Much of the suffering mentioned in the poem was experienced by MacLean's own ancestors and he is aware of the situations on enough of a personal level to be sensitive to such issues. However, 'An Cuilithionn' describes a 'descent' into what could be described as hell and the process cannot be short-circuited but must be 'savoured to the last bitter drop' if renewed life is to be realised.⁷⁸³ Although MacLean does not completely romanticise suffering he does present it as part of his literary tradition in e.g. the Gesto girl section, thus ensuring that everyday suffering is lifted onto a more literary level. Real life situations such as the Easter Rising, the Highland Clearances and the Spanish Civil War can be explored on a more abstract level in poetry. In other words, suffering is universalised and Eagleton fears that dealing with themes in this way with the images of blood sacrifice, dying gods and rebirth is in danger of naturalising history and that the mythic cycle of birth, death and rebirth could cancel out history completely.⁷⁸⁴ He writes:

History loses its sense of direction, giving way to the cyclical, the synchronic, the epiphany of eternity, the deep grammar of all cultures, the eternal now of the unconscious, the primitive energies at the root of all life-forms, the moment in and out of time, the still point of the turning world...⁷⁸⁵

While this is a fair point I think it is also necessary to remember that 'An Cuilithionn' is a

⁷⁸¹ Eagleton, 2003, p. 36.

⁷⁸² MacLean, 1999, p. 104-108.

⁷⁸³ Eagleton, 2003, p. 37.

⁷⁸⁴ Eagleton, 2003, p. 274.

⁷⁸⁵ Eagleton, 2003, p. 206.

piece of literature, influenced by the ideas of the period, and while MacLean is capable of fully grasping the human plight and the consequences of war and sacrifice, often in literature singular situations are taken and are searched for the underlying meanings and truths inherent in them. If MacLean was to produce poetry devoid of everything except realism 'An Cuilithionn' would be replaced by something akin to the Soviet literature commissioned by the Communist Party in which no individuality was allowed to flourish. While MacLean is aware of realism his poetry is balanced by the symbolic, in which the idea of heroic sacrifice can find its place. There is also the possibility that years of suffering and oppression brings out, in some individuals at least, the feeling that sacrifice is the only option and thus symbolism takes on a power which it would not otherwise possess - this may have been the thinking in Ireland in the early twentieth century.

6.2.2 The Irish Literary Renaissance: O'Grady's style of heroism and the Parnell 'myth'

In the 1890s writers in Ireland began to re-imagine their culture and their heroes and there were the beginnings of what is known as the Irish Literary Renaissance or the Literary Revival. This literary movement went on to have not just a major impact on Ireland's literature but also on the politics of the country. The growing prosperity of the lower and middle classes meant that the old social order was losing power and the need to retain a feudal and aristocratic tradition led Standish O'Grady to publish a pamphlet in 1882 entitled *The Crisis in Ireland*⁷⁸⁶. He realised that the large estates would eventually be dissolved but he wanted to at least preserve the symbol of the aristocrat as a 'wise statesman looking only to the welfare of the country.'⁷⁸⁷

Murray Pittock writes that Standish O'Grady, 'although a unionist, provided a profoundly nationalist agenda in his presentation of the Ulster and Fenian cycles of Irish myth'.⁷⁸⁸ Of course, O'Grady's 'nationalism' may not have been as overt as those who went on to adopt the figures which O'Grady had brought to an English speaking readership. His *History of Ireland: Heroic Period* (1878), *Finn and his Companions* (1893), and *The Coming of*

⁷⁸⁶ Wayne E. Hall, *Shadowy Heroes: Irish Literature of the 1890s* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1980) p. x.

⁷⁸⁷ Hall, 1980, pp. 30-31.

⁷⁸⁸ Pittock, 1999, p. 77.

Cuchulain (1895) would all later be used by Nationalists to fuel their own agendas.⁷⁸⁹ Declan Kiberd writes about O’Grady’s dismay upon hearing the poet and mystic, George Russell, preaching about the return of ancient Irish heroes to a more ‘down market’ audience on the esplanade at Bray – O’Grady’s own idea had been to bring into consciousness examples of ancient Irish heroes to re-animate the declining Anglo-Irish aristocracy.⁷⁹⁰ His mythic heroes contained echoes of MacPherson’s *Ossian*, thus creating a link between the oral and literary history of a noble Ireland and Scotland, while also using these individual warriors to oppose Arnoldian emotionalism.⁷⁹¹ In Part II of ‘An Cuilithinn’ MacLean continues this literary tradition between Ireland and Scotland by using Cú Chulainn as a symbol in order to describe the Cuillin in awe-inspiring, powerful terms:

Ris an fhaobairne, Mac Cuilithinn,
cha robh Goll no Fionn no uilebheist
a dheachdadh le mac-meanmna daonnda
ach mar mhìol air druim na daolaig
ri Cù-chulainn ’na arm-aodach.⁷⁹²

Perhaps MacLean makes a connection with Cú Chulainn and the Cuillin due to the legend in which he comes to train with Scathach on Skye before returning to Ireland. It is clear that he holds Cú Chulainn in even more awe than the other Celtic heroes such as Fionn Mac Cumhaill and Goll Mac Morna and thus, it is likely that MacLean’s view of Cú Chulainn is inspired by the Irish Literary Renaissance more than his own native tradition or place-names. While Fionn would have been well known from the tales and ballads of Gaelic tradition, the Irish Literary Renaissance writers put more emphasis on Cú Chulainn as a hero for the whole of Ireland.

The other significant reason in Ireland for the growing interest in heroes such as Cú Chulainn was the situation after the death of the nationalist leader Charles Stewart Parnell in 1891. The Church had opposed Parnell mainly on moral grounds due to his relationship with a married woman and when he died an early death people began to view him as a tragic hero and he began to appeal to the Fenians. As a response to Parnell’s death *United Ireland* described him in almost mythic terms in the October 1891 issue and a new cult of the hero

⁷⁸⁹ Pittock, 1999, p. 77.

⁷⁹⁰ Declan Kiberd, *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (London: Vintage, 1996) p. 196.

⁷⁹¹ Pittock, 1999, p. 78.

⁷⁹² MacLean, 1999, p. 76.

was born:

Slain, sacrificed by Irishmen on the altar of English Liberalism he, the greatest chief that this land has known in the struggle of centuries against English domination, has been murdered by the men whom he dragged from obscurity and who hated him...Murdered he has been as certainly as if the gang of conspirators had surrounded him and hacked him to pieces...shall Ireland exact no punishment for what has been done?⁷⁹³

In the passage above Parnell takes on a Christ-like, messianic role, appealing to people who might not even have agreed with his politics while he was alive. It did not matter; the power of the mythic symbol had taken over. *United Ireland's* memorial issues to Parnell became even more defined by messianic undertones – Parnell had lifted the Irish ‘from the slough of despond to the heights where hope was shining, and he brought them in sight of the Promised Land’.⁷⁹⁴ By 15th October 1892 the same publication was claiming Parnell was not dead, he ‘cannot die while the land he toiled for is unfreed’.⁷⁹⁵ He was an unlikely hero figure for the later Socialists but for the literary movement of the late nineteenth century he was a heroic figure who could be injected with even more mythic substance in death.

It is interesting to view how the ‘mythic’ Parnell and O’Grady’s vision of Cú Chulainn merge together. The heroic figure of the 1890s was a dark, tragic figure who was passionate and yet was thwarted by external forces. He was often viewed as ‘too good for this world’ and external defeat actually confirmed his heroism and inner qualities.⁷⁹⁶ Wayne E. Hall suggests that the inner qualities of simplicity, innocence and the ‘capability for transcendent vision’ of the literary hero mirrors how the Irish artists viewed themselves. These characteristics had less to do with the original heroes of Irish oral tradition and more to do with the modern conception of the artist. The failures and frustrations of the tragic hero reflect the experience of the writers themselves.⁷⁹⁷ This is an important point and one which can be applied to heroes of literary invention in many places and times. Sorley MacLean’s

⁷⁹³ Hall, 1980, p. 27.

⁷⁹⁴ Hall, 1980, p. 28.

⁷⁹⁵ Hall, 1980, p. 28. The poets joined in and further strengthened this cult of the sacrificed hero. Katherine Tynan’s poems ‘A Wandering Star’ and ‘The Dead Chief’ evoked Parnell as a Christ figure who would return and W.B. Yeats wrote ‘Mourn – And Then Onward!’, which cast Parnell as a pillar of flame coming from the tomb. Hall, 1980, p. 35.

⁷⁹⁶ Hall, 1980, p. ix.

⁷⁹⁷ Hall, 1980, p. ix.

heroes are archetypal men of action with Socialist principles and also the potential for spiritual attainment and this can perhaps be traced to the poet's own personal poetic aspirations and experiences. Thus, a modern literary hero can take on many guises from the political to the spiritual. At this stage in the Irish Literary Renaissance the writers were concentrating on the aloof, lonely, heroic individual who was involved in a struggle that ended in death.⁷⁹⁸ However, as time went on other aspects of the heroic figure would be emphasised and the messianic aspect would become of central importance within literature and the wider social-political domain.

6.2.3 Cú Chulainn in the wider Irish context

As I have shown above, Cú Chulainn can be viewed as the archetypal hero but each writer put his own specific content into this archetypal image. If the Cú Chulainn story is studied through the lens of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* the hero can be seen as part of a mythic cycle of birth, death and rebirth. Cú Chulainn is born as a human with god-like powers. He performs great feats and exhibits superhuman strength and yet, due to this exertion of energy he dies young – epic narrative dictates that the story must be brought to a close and since Cú Chulainn's role as a hero is fatally exhausting 'he must succumb to the natural rhythm of spending and waning which is a precondition of renewal.'⁷⁹⁹ He even suffers the same fate as Osiris and Orpheus – Northrop Frye calls this 'Sparagmos' or the tearing apart of the sacrificial body.⁸⁰⁰ Cú Chulainn is betrayed and is torn to pieces, a fate which the writers of *United Ireland* saw as similar to the betrayal of Parnell by the people and the subsequent 'tearing up' of his reputation. W.B. Yeats saw the figure of Cú Chulainn as central to the re-emergence of the historic and cultural imagination in Ireland. The myths had to be unearthed but they then had to be developed in order for renewed energy to be distilled into the nation. Cú Chulainn was enlarged from a local Ulster hero to a national hero. The love and admiration directed towards him by a modern readership was indistinguishable from the Nationalist love of country.⁸⁰¹ Cú Chulainn sacrificed himself in the Ulster Cycle and the modern writers took this theme seriously in relation to the rebirth of literature and the nation

⁷⁹⁸ Hall, 1980, p. xi.

⁷⁹⁹ John Wilson Foster, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival: A Changeling Art* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987) pp. 13-14.

⁸⁰⁰ Foster, 1987, p. 13.

⁸⁰¹ Foster, 1987, p. 15.

as a whole.

6.2.4 W.B. Yeats and the Theme of Sacrifice

W.B. Yeats took the theme of sacrifice in an Irish context a stage further when he wrote his play, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*.⁸⁰² It is one of Yeats' most overtly nationalistic works. In the play, it is blood sacrifice of young men that enables the rebirth of a tired and weary Ireland under foreign rule. Yeats deliberately uses a historical example of an older rising to raise questions about what his generation will do for Ireland. In the eighteenth century the deliverance of Ireland by France, Spain and the men of Ireland was linked to the messianic idea of a Second Coming of the Stuart Prince.⁸⁰³ By the twentieth century the imagined messianic figures were coming more strongly from within Ireland but it is interesting to note that there were still connections between Ireland and other countries. The Irish Nationalist trade union leader of the 1913 Dublin Strike, James Larkin, spoke of lighting 'a fiery cross in England, Scotland and Wales.' The 'fiery cross' had rallied the Highlands to war during the Jacobite period and this same emblem had appeared on the cover of the Scottish Nationalist magazine, *The Fiery Cross*, published in the early twentieth century in Scotland.⁸⁰⁴ Although a great deal of symbolism was being generated in Ireland it is interesting to view the links and influences coming from places such as Scotland because these symbols can then be traced into the Scottish Literary Renaissance and beyond. It is thus possible to see how ideas such as self-sacrifice for the greater good crept into the psyche of later writers such as Sorley MacLean and were adapted accordingly to suit the political climate of the time.

Yeats later asked himself the question, 'Did that play of mine send out/ certain men the English shot?'⁸⁰⁵ To quote Murray Pittock, *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* was indeed 'political dynamite'. The old woman in the play was not just asking the characters but also the audience to sacrifice themselves for Ireland. It was 'a call to male violence, memorialised and

⁸⁰² *W.B. Yeats: Selected Plays*, ed. by Richard Allen Cave (London: Penguin Books, 1997) pp. 19-28. The play centres on the idea of the Old Woman who comes to a cottage and implores the young man there to leave his personal life in order to fight for Ireland in the Fenian Rising of 1798. She is transformed into a proud and beautiful young woman as a result of the man taking up arms for his country.

⁸⁰³ Pittock, 1999, p. 47.

⁸⁰⁴ Pittock, 1999, p. 48.

⁸⁰⁵ *W.B. Yeats: Collected Poems* ed. by Augustine Martin (London: Vintage, 1992) pp. 360-361.

sacralized, seeking the bloodshed of the ‘devoted’ male victim for his female nation.’⁸⁰⁶ *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* sowed the seed of something that would later be impossible to keep in check. The power that literature can exact over a readership or an audience should not be underestimated. In this particular case the audience were exposed to the power of political blood-sacrifice to free the nation and gain a sense of identity. Stephen Gwynn, an older Constitutional Republican wrote ‘The effect of *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* on me was that I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot...Miss Gonne’s impersonation had stirred the audience as I have never seen another stirred.’⁸⁰⁷ P.S. O’Hegarty stated that the play was ‘a sort of sacrament’ and Constance Markievicz, when under sentence of death for her part in the 1916 Rising, expressed the belief that ‘that play of W.B. [Yeats] was a sort of gospel to me’.⁸⁰⁸

This mingling of religious terminology and nationalism was integral to the way many of the 1916 rebels, most specifically the poets, came to view their belief in Nationalism and their sacrifice. However, the Old Woman’s words about the men willing to sacrifice themselves – ‘they will have no need of prayers’ – actually removes the link between Nationalism and Catholicism.⁸⁰⁹ This attitude was not entirely new since the Fenians in the century before had viewed Irish Nationalism as having primacy over Catholicism – Nationalism became a religion in itself. Likewise, the French Catholic-Nationalist, Charles Péguy (1873-1914) exempts action done in the name of French Nationalism from God’s jurisdiction.⁸¹⁰ Irish Nationalism as a ‘religion’ is a significant idea because it means that people were free to dedicate themselves without the restrictions of a formal religion. A passionate and fierce loyalty and dedication to any cause such as Nationalism, Socialism and Communism, can take on aspects of a spiritual and religious experience. Since the secular can resemble the structure of the spiritual, writers can take a Nationalist or Socialist standpoint and still experience a sense of something underlying the political despite there being less room for proper religion on these political paths. However, there were also men such as Patrick Pearse

⁸⁰⁶ Pittock, 1999, p. 80.

⁸⁰⁷ Conor Cruise O’Brien, *Ancestral Voices: Religion and Nationalism in Ireland* (Dublin: Poolbeg Press, 1994) p. 68.

⁸⁰⁸ O’Brien, 1994, p. 68.

⁸⁰⁹ O’Brien, 1994, p. 65.

⁸¹⁰ O’Brien, 1994, p. 65.

who attempted to merge the spiritual and the political.

6.2.5 Patrick Pearse and the Easter Rising

Patrick Pearse is synonymous with the Easter Rising of 1916, an event which is closely linked to symbols of sacrifice and religious imagery. Pearse composed poetry and plays, which were saturated with sacrificial imagery and then translated them into real action. His exploration of literature and Irish history influenced the part he played in the Easter Rising. F.S.L. Lyons has observed that ‘for him [Pearse] both the crucifixion and the legend of Cu Chulain pointed the way to the sacrifice of one man for the benefit of the people.’⁸¹¹ Cú Chulainn featured greatly in Pearse’s rhetoric and led Yeats to write in ‘A General Introduction For My Work’ that ‘in the imagination of Pearse and his fellow soldiers, the sacrifice of the mass had found the Red Branch in the tapestry; they went out to die, calling upon Cuchulain.’⁸¹² Pearse’s Cú Chulainn, a figure combining youth, rebirth and political violence, was influenced by a Yeatsian vision of heroism but also had strains of O’Grady’s writing as well as the German thinker, J.G. Herder.⁸¹³ John Wilson Foster views Pearse’s short stories about the Irish peasantry as being typical of the themes explored by the urban intellectuals; ‘a heroism characterized by anonymity and community, innocence, poverty, passive endurance, and self-abnegation.’⁸¹⁴ On the other hand, his political philosophy is far more ‘masculine’ in its assertion of valour and fame. He couples this vision of Irish cultural and political resurgence with Christian myth and ritual. Ireland’s journey to rebirth could be placed on top of the Christian mythic narrative of baptism, mortification, miraculous vision, martyrdom and blood sacrifice, salvation, resurrection and redemption.⁸¹⁵ Indeed, this sense of ministry, which Pearse cultivated, is perhaps nowhere better realised than in his work with his schools, St Enda’s for boys and St Ita’s for girls. When St Enda’s opened in 1908 his conviction that heroism must be the way forward for Ireland was very visible – a large mural of Cú Chulainn as a boy, taking arms, was placed so that the new students would see it as they arrived. It was Pearse’s belief that ‘it would be a noble thing to set somewhere where

⁸¹¹ Pittock, 1999, p. 82.

⁸¹² Pittock, 1999, p. 82.

⁸¹³ Pittock, 1999, p. 81.

⁸¹⁴ Foster, 1987, p. 308.

⁸¹⁵ Foster, 1987, p. 307. This pattern of birth, death and rebirth is comparable to Frye’s model of the heroic journey.

every boy that entered might see it a picture in which the boy Cuchulain should be the central figure.’⁸¹⁶ A young student and future novelist, Pádraic Óg Ó Conaire has written ‘we weren’t there long until we understood that it was Pearse’s goal to make every student a ‘Cú Chulainn’, for Cú Chulainn was his exemplar.’⁸¹⁷ Pearse’s vision of the role St Enda’s would play was that it would act as a place in which the knightly tradition of the boy troop or ‘macradh’ of Emain Macha could be perpetuated. He wanted the boys to be given ‘...the high tradition of CúChulan...the noble tradition of the Fianna...the Christ like tradition of Colm Cille.’⁸¹⁸ Pearse wanted to show his pupils the perfect hero and he was very vocal in his aim – ‘the key note of the school life I desire is *effort* on the part of the child itself, struggle, self-sacrifice, self-discipline, for by these only does the soul rise to perfection.’⁸¹⁹ He also made sure that the heroism of Cú Chulainn would remain alive in his pupil’s minds by staging pageants in which the pupils played out the stories of the Ulster Cycle.⁸²⁰

Due to plays such as *Cathleen Ni Houlihan* the Rising was not completely unexpected. On the contrary, it had been gestating for some time and it seemed to fulfil the prophecy of writers such as Yeats. For this reason it began to resemble a ‘foredoomed classical tragedy’.⁸²¹ Declan Kiberd has gone as far as to write that the poet-rebels such as Patrick Pearse had offered their lives to the public as works of art and that they saw themselves as martyrs for beauty by aestheticising their sacrifice.⁸²² Their hope was that it would be enough of a symbol to awaken other people to the cause and that new generations of insurrectionists would take their place and ultimately would be successful as their strength and numbers grew. Thus, as Kiberd states, the rebels were following the gospel which asserted ‘the triumph of failure’ – that whoever lost his life would save it.⁸²³ A glimpse of this attitude can be viewed in Pearse’s play, *The Singer*, when the hero says ‘One man can free a people as

⁸¹⁶ Philip O’Leary, *The Prose Literature of the Gaelic Revival 1881-1921: Ideology and Innovation* (Pennsylvania, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) p. 251.

⁸¹⁷ O’Leary, 1994, 251.

⁸¹⁸ O’Leary, 1994, p. 252.

⁸¹⁹ O’Leary, 1994, p. 252.

⁸²⁰ O’Leary, 1994, p. 252. Interestingly, Wolfe Tone became a religious sacrificial martyr in Pearse’s eyes, showing how figures can be invested with different meanings and symbolism in later periods of history.

⁸²¹ Kiberd, 1996, 200.

⁸²² Kiberd, 1996, p. 201.

⁸²³ Kiberd, 1996, p. 201.

one man redeemed the world. I will take no pike – I will go into battle with bare hands. I will stand up before the Gall as Christ hung naked before men on a tree'.⁸²⁴ As Terry Eagleton points out, although selfhood was ceremoniously surrendered in the Pearsean cult of blood sacrifice it is possible that this sort of self-abnegation could only be carried out by someone with a secure self-identity. He develops his point further - 'How well you must know who you are, if you can abandon your identity safe in the knowledge that it will be restored to you a hundred fold!'⁸²⁵ Eagleton is also mindful that Pearse's cult of blood sacrifice, while seeming like the most home-grown of Irish cultural products is actually 'impeccably European', especially when James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* are considered.⁸²⁶ Pearse can therefore be seen in the context of a European phenomenon that was present in the consciousness of many writers and intellectuals at the time. Fascism also contains elements of this ideal of sacrifice, especially in the form of Nazism. At the beginning of 'Glac a' Bhàis' MacLean shows this dark side of sacrifice when he writes 'Thubhairt Nàsach air choireigin gun tug am Fuir air ais do fhir na Gearmailte 'a' chòir agus an sonas bàs fhaotainn anns an àraich'.⁸²⁷

It could be said that the Easter Rising was a 'rising' in two senses of the word. It was a rising or insurrection by a small number of the population against an imperial power, conducted at Easter when, because of the holidays, there would have been less of a military presence in Dublin, but it is also a 'rising' in the sense that individuals sacrificed themselves for a cause in the hope that it would spark a 'rising' of hope and a regeneration in Ireland. Thomas MacDonagh was well aware of the significance of the renewal of spring and of the sacrifice he was prepared to make at the Easter Rising. In 'Inscriptions of Ireland' he writes:

Winter is dead! Hark, hark, upon our hills
The voices for whose coming thou didst yearn!
Hail Spring! O Life, with happy Spring return!
O Love, revive! Joy's laugh the dawn-tide fills.

I shall not see him coming, Joy the vernal,
Joy to the heart-wakener, with his songs and roses:
To thee the Spring: to me Death, who discloses

⁸²⁴ Kiberd, 1996, p. 201.

⁸²⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Heathcliff and the Great Hunger: Studies in Irish Culture* (London: Verso, 1995) p. 243.

⁸²⁶ Eagleton, 1995, p. 261.

⁸²⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 210.

The splendour of another Joy, eternal!⁸²⁸

MacDonagh is employing the imagery of the seasons to symbolise the narrative structure of his own life and death - incidentally, the same structure of the seasons described by Frye in his heroic paradigm - and there is an understanding of the inevitability of his death for his cause which is foreseen in the poem. Joseph Plunkett's poem to Caitlín Ní Uallacháin, 'The Little Black Rose Shall Be Red At Last', shows that he is also aware of the power of blood sacrifice. There is a sense of foreboding and also resignation about the part that Plunkett knows he will play in the future Rising:

Because we share our sorrows and our joys
 And all your dear and intimate thoughts are mine
 We shall not fear the trumpets and the noise
 Of battle, for we know our dreams divine,
 ...
 Praise God if this my blood fulfils the doom
 When you, dark rose, shall redden into bloom.⁸²⁹

The Easter Rising can be studied through the lens of mythic narrative. In *The Coming of the Revolution* in November 1913 Pearse wrote of a personal and collective Messiah:

I do not know if the Messiah has yet come and I am not sure that there will yet be any visible and personal Messiah in this redemption: the people itself will perhaps be its own Messiah, the people labouring, scourged, crowned with thorns, agonising and dying, to rise again immortal and impossible.⁸³⁰

Pearse's view of Ireland as a crucified nation progressed to an idea of a national resurrection and redemption. As Conor Cruise O'Brien points out, the constitutional-nationalist support of the British war effort was the equivalent of the Fall and for national redemption to take place, national crucifixion and resurrection had to happen at Easter.⁸³¹ It was perhaps misguided that Pearse thought his own sacrifice could save a nation and yet, in Yeats's words in 'Easter 1916':

MacDonagh and MacBride
 And Connolly and Pearse
 Now and in time to be,
 Wherever green is worn,
 Are changed, changed utterly:

⁸²⁸ *The 1916 Poets*, ed. by Desmond Ryan (Connecticut: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1963) p. 126.

⁸²⁹ Ryan, 1963, p. 201.

⁸³⁰ O'Brien, 1994, p. 107.

⁸³¹ O'Brien, 1994, p. 108.

A terrible beauty is born.⁸³²

Due to the executions, which were spun out over a period of weeks, the result of the Rising did have the desired effect. The statue of the dying Cú Chulainn in the GPO stands as proof of the subsequent way in which the Rising became an important symbol of sacrifice in the history of Ireland despite the fact that it was not well received by many Dubliners at the time of it taking place.⁸³³

Conor Cruise O'Brien suggests that Pearse was completely aware that he was raising the ghosts of Ireland's past for his own present situation. In 1915 Pearse wrote the pamphlet, *Ghosts*, in which he states 'Thus Tone, thus Davis, thus Lalor, thus Parnell. Methinks I have raised some ghosts that will take a little laying.'⁸³⁴ This comment is highly significant when considering the events of 1916 since by using symbols such as these, as well as Cú Chulainn and Christ, Pearse was consciously setting out a mythic pattern on which he could lay the present events. This conscious use of myth and symbol raises some questions, especially when it is taken into consideration how close in time Easter 1916 was to other events in Europe that Sorley MacLean wrote about in his poetry. I have already given evidence of MacLean's discussions about the Irish situation with his friends (see p. 24), and it should be remembered that since actual events in Ireland were coupled almost simultaneously with literature, as opposed to the literatures being created with hindsight, the situation in Ireland would almost certainly have been used as an example of history and literature merging together. To take the point further, it is not too difficult to see MacLean's own vision of heroic struggle and sacrifice in the face of Fascism as being at least partly influenced and informed by the symbolism of sacrifice in the poetry of Ireland in the early twentieth century. MacLean certainly raises ghosts of his own when he lists the heroes throughout history who he finds meaningful to his own cause.

Declan Kiberd puts forward an important theory when considering the Irish situation in the wider context. He states that uprisings fail when they merely mimic what has gone before. Karl Marx had complained about the tendency for people on the brink of innovation to resort to a 'costume drama' in which history is repeated and in which the ghosts then appear to steal

⁸³² Martin, 1992, p. 178.

⁸³³ Kiberd, 1996, p. 193

⁸³⁴ O'Brien, 1994, p. 103.

their revolution.⁸³⁵ Kiberd suggests that the real challenge for the 1916 rebels was to create a new unprecedented self and to repossess their emotions. He cites Yeats - ‘we move others not because we have understood or thought about those others, but because all life has the same root’ – and makes it clear that Yeats was urging people to invent themselves, not to be exactly like a specific hero.⁸³⁶ Thus, the Easter Rising protagonists and the poets who immortalised this event were actually exploring their sense of identity just as Sorley MacLean appears to be doing in ‘An Cuilithionn’. Yeats wrote ‘when the imaginary saint or lover or hero moves us most deeply, it is the moment when he awakens in us for an instant our own heroism, our own sanctity, our own desire’.⁸³⁷ If Kiberd’s theory is applied to ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean’s politics can be seen to merge with concepts relating to his own personal identity. Old figures from times that are past can be used – Pearse summoned Cú Chulainn just as French businessmen in 1789 imagined themselves in the role of ancient Romans recovering democratic rights⁸³⁸ and Sorley MacLean re-imagined Spartacus as a Socialist hero, with similarities to Christ, crucified for his beliefs.⁸³⁹ Thus, people find their own type of heroism and it does not remain narrowly rigid or specifically nationalist. In many instances it becomes more universal. Kiberd views the Rising through the lens of Jean-Paul Sartre who, although writing a decade later, shows that events such as Easter 1916 are best understood in existential terms when he writes ‘as soon as man conceives himself free, and determines to use that freedom...then his work takes on the character of a play.’⁸⁴⁰ Kiberd suggests that the rebel’s play was staged to gather an Irish audience and challenge an English one.⁸⁴¹ If this point is expanded it could be said that men such as Pearse saw sacrifice as a way of defining their freedom and that this collective sacrificing of the self for a common cause in turn freed Ireland. Again, I view similarities with this situation and later poets such as Sorley MacLean. ‘An Cuilithionn’ is a poem which is focussed towards a collective struggle and yet at the end of the poem the vision of hope can be viewed as personal, especially when the ‘Có seo’ passage is considered. At the end of Part VII of ‘An

⁸³⁵ Kiberd, 1996, p. 202.

⁸³⁶ Kiberd, 1996, p. 203.

⁸³⁷ Kiberd, 1996, p. 203.

⁸³⁸ Kiberd, 1996, p. 206.

⁸³⁹ See Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’ – ‘Crìosda an crochadh air a’ chrois/ agus Spartacus ’na chois,/ gach mìle bliadhna saothrach maille,/ duilleagan searbha an ròis shaille:’ MacLean, 1999, p. 126.

⁸⁴⁰ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Life/ Situations* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) quoted in Kiberd, 1996, p. 204.

⁸⁴¹ Kiberd, 1996, p. 204.

Cuilithionn' MacLean has a vision of a spirit which is walking on the mountain:

Có seo, có seo oidhche 'n anama
 a' leantainn fiaradh an leòis fhalbhaich?
 Chan eil, chan eil ach am falbhan
 a' sireadh a' Chuilithinn thar fairge.⁸⁴²

If it is assumed that this vision is showing MacLean a part of himself i.e. his own spirit or a sense of spiritual attainment, which he manages to glimpse a little ahead of himself on the mountain, then the poem takes on a personal significance – MacLean's search for human spirit and hope amidst the suffering of the world results in him also glimpsing a part of his own humanity and spirit.

Both Yeats and Pearse were engaged in a personal journey as well as a more public one. Their poetry and actions were conducted in the belief that each generation was set its own task to fulfil and they were aware of theirs – the 1916 Proclamation noted that six times in the previous three centuries national rights had been asserted in arms.⁸⁴³ Pearse viewed history as cyclical⁸⁴⁴ and this corresponds with the fact that the Rising was conducted at Easter with the connotations of the mythic narrative that I have already discussed above. This view of history was self-conscious and was part of a set of ideas that were being explored in other countries in the same period e.g. Ortega Y Gasset in Spain. This strong notion of 'generation' was something that was understood among European intellectuals after the turn of the century partly as a result of Freud's Oedipus theories and partly due to social change which was widening the gap between the old and the young.⁸⁴⁵ It can also be viewed in 'An Cuilithionn' with MacLean's dedication of the poem to Alexander Macdonald and Hugh MacDiarmid, who were poets whom he admired greatly.⁸⁴⁶ Also, his description of Màiri Mhór standing at his side⁸⁴⁷ is similar to the attitude of Yeats and Pearse – Cú Chulainn may have been among

⁸⁴² MacLean, 1999, p. 128.

⁸⁴³ Kiberd, 1996, p. 205.

⁸⁴⁴ Kiberd, 1996, p. 205.

⁸⁴⁵ Kiberd, 1996, p. 205.

⁸⁴⁶ See MacLean, 1999, p. 64. 'A Chrìstein MhicGréidhir, MhicDhiarmaid,/ na robh agamsa an iarmad/ a sgrìobhadh o bhàrrlach train bheag/ d'aighe gheur dhomhainn fhiadhaich,... Agus, a Dhòmhnallaich ghlòrmhoir,/ na robh agam trian do threòir-sa,/ chumainn ar Clàr-Sgìthe òirdhearc/ ceann-caol ri tuinn àr na h-Eòrpa.'

⁸⁴⁷ See MacLean, 1999, p. 90. 's feumar stad far am fógainn./ Sgitheanach ri taobh Màiri Móire./ Ach chan inns mi dh' a spiorad làidir/ nach tàinig tilleadh air an tràigh ud;/ seachnaidh mi clàr treun a h-aodainn/ 's mo sgeul air buaidh ar n-Eilein traoighte.'

the men in the GPO but MacLean has his own ghosts in mind on the Cuillin and they are just as significant to him. During the 1930s MacLean and his peers were aware that Fascism was being asserted and that the role of their generation was to try to stem the tide of radical right wing politics. When this is taken into consideration it is understandable that ‘An Cuilithionn’ is full of symbols of sacrifice and heroism. MacLean felt that Europe was teetering on the brink of destruction and this feeling was manifested in the apocalyptic imagery that is present in ‘An Cuilithionn’. Just as Pearse took old images and figures and recast them to suit his purpose, MacLean mirrors this action by naming people in ‘An Cuilithionn’ and investing them with his own ideals and vision of the future. Thus he revives the ghosts of the past and uses them in an innovative way.

6.2.6 James Connolly: The Socialist Perspective of Self-Sacrifice

James Connolly, the Irish Socialist who fought next to Pearse during the Easter Rising is one of Sorley MacLean’s heroes and is in a way a more likely focus for MacLean’s poetry compared with Pearse, mainly due to the fact that Connolly seems to be the realistic Socialist to Pearse’s romantic Nationalist. In Ireland in the early years of the twentieth century Nationalism was strong and James Connolly, although a Socialist, had to interact with Nationalism on some level if Socialism was to achieve a foothold. Although he was dismissive of Home Rule politicians he was more open to the radical Nationalists. He contributed to the journal, *Shan Van Vocht*, and he took part in the anti-Jubilee demonstrations with Maud Gonne in June 1897 and was arrested.⁸⁴⁸ He saw two distinct groups of Nationalists – the Home Rulers who had no problem accepting the British monarchy and the connection it had with their country, and the Republicans who wanted complete political independence. He had far more in common with the latter. He wrote on the subject of this:

Even when he is from the economic view intensely Conservative, the Irish Nationalist...is an active agent in social regeneration, in so far as he seeks to invest with full power over its own destinies a people actually governed in the interests of a feudal aristocracy.⁸⁴⁹

He saw that separate paths were justified between Ireland and England because of their differences – ‘The national and racial characteristics of the English and Irish people are

⁸⁴⁸ David Howell, *A Lost Left: Three Studies in Socialism and Nationalism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1986) p. 34.

⁸⁴⁹ Howell, 1986, p. 34.

different, their political history and traditions are antagonistic, the economic pace of the one is not on a par with the other.⁸⁵⁰ Already it can be seen that Connolly was moving away from the accepted form of Socialism of the British Socialists who were more likely to define their ideals in strictly internationalist terms.⁸⁵¹ Pearse's relationship with Connolly affected both Pearse's Nationalism and Connolly's Socialism – Connolly opened Pearse's eyes to the plight of the working man, especially during the Dublin Lockout of 1913. Connolly's dealings with the likes of Pearse, Countess Markievicz and Sheehy-Skeffington made him realise that Socialism could be reconciled to a certain extent with Nationalism without Nationalism deadening his Socialist commitments.⁸⁵² This sort of attitude enraged hardline Socialists but Connolly was becoming disillusioned with not only the timidity and failure of the British labour movement to back the Dublin workers with industrial action in 1913 but also by the fact that the 'Second International' capitulated to the 'imperialistic war' in 1914. He wrote in *Forward* in August 1914, 'What then becomes of all our resolutions; all our protests of fraternization; all our threats of general strikes; all our carefully built machinery of internationalism; all our hopes for the future?'⁸⁵³

Due to the war Connolly moved closer to the nationalism of Pearse and others. He felt that a rising would stop the threat of conscription, it would halt the amount of casualties sustained by the war while itself causing the minimum of casualties and it would loosen the grip of capitalism.⁸⁵⁴ Although he continued to emphasise the centrality of Socialist and Labour ideals his use of Nationalist themes and rhetoric were heightened to gain maximum effect. Pearse's influence can be seen to emerge in Connolly's speeches before Easter 1916 with talk of sacrifice and rejuvenation. In *Worker's Republic*, 5th February 1916 he wrote:

no agency less potent than the red-tide of war on Irish soil will ever be able to enable the Irish race to recover its self-respect or establish its national dignity in the face of a world horrified and scandalised by

⁸⁵⁰ Howell, 1986, p. 37.

⁸⁵¹ To a certain extent John Maclean does have certain things in common with Connolly in relation to this – he campaigned for a Scottish Communist Party in 1920 but lost out to the Communist Party of Great Britain, see Milton, 1973, p. 10. This specific move was fuelled by the desire that Scotland should be distinctive from Great Britain. He held the belief that Scotland was best represented in Socialist politics when it stood on its own. It was possible to be a Socialist and still hold these views.

⁸⁵² Howell, 1986, pp. 125-126.

⁸⁵³ Young, 1992, p. 159.

⁸⁵⁴ Howell, 1986, p. 135.

what must seem to them our national apostasy.⁸⁵⁵

Of course, it should be remembered that while Connolly was a Socialist, he was also a life-long Catholic and thus the sacrificial-religious imagery used by so many of the Nationalists before the Rising would have been familiar to him in at least this part of his belief system. David Howell has suggested that a Socialist operating within a Catholic-Nationalist culture would absorb the dominant sacrificial imagery to a greater extent and this certainly seems to have been the case when Connolly states:

Without the slightest trace of irreverence, but in all due humility and awe, we recognise that of all of us as of mankind before Calvary it may truly be said – ‘without the Shedding of Blood there is no redemption.’⁸⁵⁶

Connolly may have retained his Socialist ideals but when speeches like the one above are taken into consideration, he was also aware of his place within the Nationalist-mythic narrative that was unfolding and would culminate in Easter 1916. Terry Eagleton goes as far as to say that the Irish Literary Renaissance is a misnomer since poets and political figures were mixing with ease - Yeats was organising political demonstrations and Connolly was lecturing backstage at the Abbey Theatre and he even regarded his *Labour in Irish History* as belonging to the literature of the Irish Renaissance.⁸⁵⁷

After the rebels had been shot (between 3rd-12th May), the Rising was not immediately regarded as a victory for Socialism. However, by the 1930s Sorley MacLean shows in ‘An Cuilithionn’ that the lines were beginning to blur and that Connolly could exist as a potent symbol alongside other Socialist revolutionaries. The impact of Socialist opinion in the aftermath was actually minimal and many Socialists condemned the Rising due to the concessions that Connolly made to the Nationalists. However, Lenin took a favourable view of the Rising’s possible significance when he wrote in 1949:

A blow delivered against the British imperialist bourgeoisie in Ireland has a hundred times more political significance than a blow of equal weight would have in Asia or Africa...The misfortune of the Irish is that they rose prematurely, when the European revolt of the proletariat had not yet matured.⁸⁵⁸

Perhaps if the rebels had waited until after compulsory conscription had been introduced in

⁸⁵⁵ Howell, 1986, p. 143.

⁸⁵⁶ Howell, 1986, p. 143.

⁸⁵⁷ Eagleton, 1995, p. 304.

⁸⁵⁸ Howell, 1986, p. 150.

Ireland they would have been able to garner more support from the Irish people. However, the significance of an 'Easter' Rising overtook rational considerations such as this and it turned out that symbolism proved more important within the imaginations of the main leaders of the Rising. Sorley MacLean's motives for naming Pearse, Connolly, Wolfe Tone etc in his passage on Ireland in the 'Clio' section of Part VI of 'An Cuilithionn' should be studied in relation to this.⁸⁵⁹ If 'pure' Socialism was the main theme of the poem MacLean could have picked figures with a far purer Socialist background e.g. James Larkin. There is no doubt that the figures MacLean employs in 'An Cuilithionn' are iconic and revolutionary but they are also 'mythic' in the sense that they have the weight of a poetic tradition already surrounding them and these men were themselves creating myths a-new. Perhaps the poet in MacLean appreciated the power of the symbolism in these figures more than his Socialist self would care to admit. The power of a conscious self-sacrifice such as men like Pearse and Connolly exhibited is difficult to ignore and the intensity of this particular strain of heroism appeals to MacLean who is addressing the same sort of themes in 'An Cuilithionn'.

6.3 The Rose as Symbol of Spiritual Sacrifice: Yeatsian Influences on 'An Cuilithionn'

I have so far established that self-sacrifice took on a mythic dimension in Ireland due to the actions of the Easter rebels and the writers that came before and after them. While the sacrifice had a major political motive, there was also a symbolic aspect which cannot be ignored. MacLean also employs the same sort of imagery as the Irish Renaissance poets relating to spiritual sacrifice, death, and rebirth. In this context the rose is the main symbol that reminds the reader that heroic blood has been shed. Douglas Young, in a letter to MacLean on 26th June 1940, shows an awareness of the parallels between MacLean's use of the symbol and the Irish poets of the Renaissance - 'I am much taken by most of the symbolism, especially the Stallion and the Bog, less so by the Rose - overworked by Yeats.'⁸⁶⁰ Although Young's opinion here is less than favourable MacLean's use of a symbol with such overt links to Yeats cannot be ignored and it may be that MacLean was using an obvious symbol to deliberately point to a symbolic tradition.

⁸⁵⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 112.

⁸⁶⁰ MS 29540, NLS, f. 16.

As a symbol, the rose traditionally stands for the soul, heart and the fulfilment of love and for this reason is connected with the muse or a poet's love for a beautiful woman. In MacLean's *Dàin do Eimhir* the rose is used by MacLean to describe his love of 'Eimhir' and also to praise Eimhir's beauty. In *Dàin LIV* he writes:

Bu tu camhanaich air a' Chuilithionn
's latha suilbhir air a' Chlàraich,
grian air a h-uilinn anns an òr-shruth
agus ròs geal bristeadh fàire.⁸⁶¹

He describes Eimhir as being like the beauty of dawn and like a white rose on the horizon, which gives connotations of fresh new life that is pure and removed from the hardships and toil of everyday existence. This coincides with MacLean's vision of Eimhir as a spiritual force and a muse-like figure in his life. The idea of the rose as a symbol of the beauty of a mortal woman as the inspiration of the poet is certainly not exclusive to MacLean's work. Parallels can be drawn with W.B. Yeats and his love for Maud Gonne. His love for Gonne led him to contemplate the idea of beauty and how it can transcend time and place in order to become an aesthetic vision of eternal beauty. Yeats' collection of poems, *The Rose*, includes many poems that explore this theme. In 'The Rose of the World' the ideal of beauty is traced throughout time:

Who dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?
For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam
And Usna's children died.⁸⁶²

Eternal beauty can be manifested in women throughout literature and history including Helen of Troy and Yeats's own muse-figure, Maud Gonne. However, Yeats makes the point that a balance must be reached between the real and the ideal – if he ever fully attains his muse/eternal beauty in the real sense he believes that it will be lost to him.

Chevalier and Gheerbrant write that the commonest aspect of the rose is that of 'manifestation, rising from the primeval waters to blossom above them.' It is this description of the rose which has more in common with the rose of 'An Cuilithionn'. In Part III of the poem MacLean laments the fall of mankind and makes it clear that the powerful nature of the morass, which symbolises the evil that is manifest in the world, is capable of swallowing up

⁸⁶¹ Whyte, 2002, p.108.

⁸⁶² Martin, 1992, p. 32.

purity and goodness. He uses a rose and a lily to convey this point:

Tha ioma ròs is lili bhòidheach
 a' cinntinn air uachdar na mòintich,
 bòidheach ann an dath 's an còmhdach
 ged a dh'fhàs iad air an òtraich,
 ach thig a' bhréine anns an anam
 a' mealladh rudhadh na fala.⁸⁶³

Just as 'Eimhir' and Yeats's Maud Gonne cannot fully exist as the ideal of eternal beauty by being real, so it seems that the rose cannot survive against the evils inherent in the real world and will ultimately be overcome. This depressing realization is continued in Part IV when MacLean states:

Tha oidhche na mòintich air mo shùilean
 's i air drùdhadh air mo léirsinn;
 chan eil mo dhòchas ri ùr dhreach
 no ri ùr ghile gréine.⁸⁶⁴

MacLean is showing that worldly matters prevent him from reaching his aesthetic vision and that his sense of duty to those suffering oppression must override his love. There is a definite connection between a blooming flower, specifically a rose, and the brightness of the sun rising at dawn, which is hinted at above and is a theme that continues throughout the poem. I have already stated earlier in the thesis that due to MacLean's emphasis on Socialism, on one level the red rose that rises over the world could be taken as a symbol of the new dawn of Communism, which MacLean viewed as imperative if Europe was to be saved from the threat of Fascism. In Part V, almost directly after MacLean has expressed his sadness that there will be no more new bloom or the sun – 'Chan eil mo dhòchas ri ùr dhreach/ no ri ùr ghile gréine,⁸⁶⁵ - there appears a new symbol of hope in the form of a fresh red rose in the sky. This red rose stands for the red banner of Socialism:

Chuala mi gum facas bristeadh
 agus clisgeadh air an fhàire,
 gum facas ròs dearg ùrail
 thar saoghal brùite màbte;
 chuala mi mu Abhainn Chluaidh
 a bhith air tuar na càrnaid;⁸⁶⁶

MacDiarmid also uses the rose as a symbol of Socialism in 'A Drunk Man Looks at the

⁸⁶³ MacLean, 1999, p. 84.

⁸⁶⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 94.

⁸⁶⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 94.

⁸⁶⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 96

Thistle'. The 'rose' is the flower on the thistle and thus a duality exists between the ugly thorns and the bright flowers and by extension between despair and hope.⁸⁶⁷ MacDiarmid sees this duality as being present in the failure of the General Strike of May 1926. He uses a rose to symbolise the brightness and fiery passion of this new political ideal:

I saw a rose come loupin' oot
 Frae a camsteerie plant.
 O wha'd he'e thocht yon puir stock had
 Sic an inhabitant?

...

And still it grew till a' the buss
 Was hidden in its flame.
 I never saw sae braw a floo'er
 As yon thrawn stock became.

And still it grew until it seemed
 The hail braid earth had turned
 A reid reid rose that in the lift
 Like a ball o' fire burned.⁸⁶⁸

The examples above describe the rose as a political symbol but the rose is also traditionally a Christian symbol - the rose as chalice into which Christ's blood flowed, the wounds of Christ or the transfiguration of the drops of blood. In Rosicrucian iconography the rose is the emblem at the very centre of the cross, where Christ's sacred heart is located. Because of this relationship with blood and Christ the rose is viewed as a symbol of mystical rebirth. Mircea Eliade has observed that roses grew up from the blood of Adonis as he lay dying in Classical myth.⁸⁶⁹ Because of its connotations with rebirth the rose is often connected to the symbol of the wheel, itself a symbol of cycles, renewal and movement. From a Jungian perspective the rose windows of cathedrals represent the self of man transposed onto the cosmic plane - movement and rebirth symbolise the development of the individual as well as the wider world. In Part III of 'An Cuilithionn' MacLean shows that he understands this spiritual significance of the rose when he writes:

Chunnacas gach flùr a dh' fhàsas,
 eadhon an taobh gonte cràiteach;
 ach ann an aon chan fhacas riamh ann
 tuigse Lenin is taobh dearg Chrìosda;
 chan fhaicear an dithis còmhla

⁸⁶⁷ Watson, 1985, p. 40.

⁸⁶⁸ Riach and Grieve, 1994, pp. 64-66.

⁸⁶⁹ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. translated by Rosemary Sheed (London, Sheed and Ward, 1958), p. 302.

a dh'aindeoin farsaingeachd na mòintich;
 chan fhaicear ann an aon àit' iad
 ach air mullach lom nan àrd bheann.⁸⁷⁰

In this stanza he uses a flower to represent the wounded side of Christ. Taken a stage further the rose or other red flower is a symbol of Christ's sacrifice for mankind. This image is reinforced further with the idea that Christ and the red flower can only be found on the high mountain. Christ's crucifixion took place on a hill and thus the cross or 'tree' on a high place contains Christ's sacrifice in the form of a rose – literally a 'rose tree'. The rose is often used as a symbol for Christ in Christian writing. The 'Rosy Cross' can be found in Rosicrucian icons and is associated with the 'world soul' - it is the tree of life and fuses the flesh with the spirit due to the sacrifice of Christ who transmuted mortality and the grave's corruption into spiritual beauty.⁸⁷¹ In 'An Cuilithionn' this spiritual beauty is symbolised as the dawn rising as a fresh red rose above the mountain. It is significant that the rose, tree, cross and sun are all connected to the mountain - it not only relates to the Christian imagery of the cross on a hill but it also links the earth below with the heavens above. The mountain creates a suspension in time and place which allows the symbol of the rose to be seen rising without being spoiled and corrupted by the morass of evil below the mountain:

's ag éirigh á bochdainn 's a acras
 á cruaidh chàs s a' creuchdan
 meirghe mhór dhearg an spioraid
 nach leagar an dèidh éirigh.⁸⁷²

In W.B. Yeats' *The Rose*, the rose represents a mystical and eternal state of perfection – the poet, trapped in a limiting world of change and decay longs for the divine rapture that will come when his soul is united with the rose.⁸⁷³ In 'To the Rose Upon the Rood of Time' Yeats combines defeat with victory. This brings to mind the victory of the cross after the sacrifice. In his poem, crucified by the sorrow of time and change, the beauty of the rose manages to remain eternal:

Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days!
 ...
Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,
I find under the boughs of love and hate,

⁸⁷⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 90.

⁸⁷¹ Virginia Hyde, 'D.H. Lawrence, W.B. Yeats and the *Rosa Mundi*',
 <<http://www.clemson.edu/caah/cedp/Ireland%20PDFs/Hyde.pdf>> {25/01/06}

⁸⁷² MacLean, 1999, p. 118.

⁸⁷³ Hall, 1980, p. 176.

*In all the poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal beauty wandering on her way.*⁸⁷⁴

According to Virginia Hyde the flowering crucifix or tree of sacrifice was used by the like of Yeats and came from his knowledge of the myths discussed in James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. The volume entitled *Adonis, Attis, Osiris* was of major interest because it dealt with dying and resurrecting gods.⁸⁷⁵ Although Yeats translates this imagery into Christian imagery in poems such as 'Calvary' and 'The Resurrection', other poems use different individuals in the role of the sacrificial victim. 'The Rose Tree' in particular casts the Easter week rebels as the human sacrifice within a political context:

'But where can we draw water,'
Said Pearse to Connolly.
'When all the wells are parched away?
O plain as plain can be
There's nothing but our own red blood
Can make a right Rose Tree.'⁸⁷⁶

Although MacLean uses Christ-like imagery in his poem in relation to heroism and self-sacrifice it is clear that, like Yeats, he has more than one individual within his vision of heroism. This is also the case in MacDiarmid's 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle' – Catherine Kerrigan points out that the Drunk Man recognises that the heroes of history are those that are prepared to make an act of sacrifice and that this act leads to a new level of freedom for all men. The Drunk Man goes on to wonder what it would mean to take up this idea of heroism and he seeks the truth that will help him to manifest this purpose. With these thoughts in mind he explores his own soul and by extension, the roots of his own nation's soul.⁸⁷⁷ The thistle, with its rose-like head, becomes the main focus of the Drunk Man's thoughts and he struggles to align the flesh with the soul as he looks at the thistle with its thorns and flowers accentuated in the moonlight. Ann Edwards Boutelle describes this as a 'neverending crucifixion'⁸⁷⁸ taking place before the eyes of the Drunk Man – the thistle reaches up to heaven and has its roots deep in the earth and therefore it contains beauty and

⁸⁷⁴ Martin, 1992, 27.

⁸⁷⁵ Hyde, <<http://www.clemson.edu/caah/cedp/Ireland%20PDFs/Hyde.pdf>> {25/01/06}

⁸⁷⁶ Martin, 1992, p. 179.

⁸⁷⁷ Kerrigan, 1983, p. 115.

⁸⁷⁸ Ann Edwards Boutelle, *Thistle and Rose: A Study of Hugh MacDiarmid's Poetry* (Loanhead: MacDoanld Publishers, 1980) p. 87.

pain and symbolically and paradoxically yokes extremes.⁸⁷⁹

I'll ha'e nae hauf-way hoose, but aye be whaur
 Extremes meet - it's the only way I ken
 To dodge the curst conceit o' bein' richt
 That damns the vast majority o' men.⁸⁸⁰

Boutelle suggests that MacDiarmid manages to uphold the traditional associations of the rose such as perfection, beauty, love, woman, fulfilment and Christ by showing the thistle like a tree with its topmost branches bursting forth into flowers that he calls 'roses'.⁸⁸¹ However, the agony and ugliness of the thistle mean that the rose is still linked to suffering as shown when MacDiarmid connects the thistle's prickles with Christ's crown of thorns and the blood that Christ shed – 'Christ, bleedin' like the thistle's roses'.⁸⁸² The Drunk Man is searching for a 'marriage of Heaven and Hell' – there is the glimpse of a past Eden but it must be contrasted to the hell of contemporary Scotland and a fallen mankind.⁸⁸³ Thus, like a crucifixion and sacrifice of a hero, the thistle, which represents this crucifixion, can be both beautiful and hopeful and painfully despairing just as heroic sacrifice holds the agony of the flesh and the hopes of the spirit in tension.

The mountain in MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn', with the description of the rose on its summit fulfils the same role as MacDiarmid's rose/thistle. In 'An Cuilithionn' the descriptions of the heroic sacrifice that MacLean sees as necessary for a new dawn to come are almost apocalyptic:

Seall a-mach, an e 'n là e,
 's mi ri feitheamh na fàire,
 's mi ri coimhead a' Chuilithinn
 gus an tulgadh bhith sàsaicht';
 seall a-mach, an e mhadainn
 a tha balladh nan speuran;
 agus faic an e 'n ròs dearg
 a tha 'g òradh nan sléibhtean?⁸⁸⁴

MacLean again connects the rising sun with the rose and he develops the image further by

⁸⁷⁹ Boutelle, 1980, p. 87.

⁸⁸⁰ Riach and Grieve, 1994, p. 30.

⁸⁸¹ Boutelle, 1980, p. 88.

⁸⁸² Riach and Grieve, 1994, p. 81.

⁸⁸³ Boutelle, 1980, p. 98.

⁸⁸⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 116.

linking it to the rising spirit of the hero who is prepared to sacrifice his own life for the greater good. Not only are there parallels with the ‘rising son’ in Christianity but this idea would also have been at the forefront of MacLean’s mind at a time when Europe was on the brink of war and young men were having to decide whether to be prepared to sacrifice their own lives in order to stop the spread of Fascism. The rose mirrors this suffering in Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’:

an t-ànradh goirt mairbhteach fada:
 Crìosda an crochadh air a’ chrois
 agus Spartacus ’na chois,
 gach mìle bliadhna saothrach maille,
 duilleagan searbha an ròis shaille:
 an dubh-chosnadh ’na throm-laighe,
 ...
 duilleagan an ròis iargalt
 ’nan trom-laighe air an iarmailt.⁸⁸⁵

The agony and pain of sacrifice means that there must be another side to the rose. The heroic code or ideal from which MacLean appears to be taking his inspiration dictates that life and death are interdependent and rebirth can only happen once the bitter pain of sacrifice has taken place, hence the image of the salt rose. In *Last Poems* D.H. Lawrence celebrates the human being as ‘a rose tree bronzy with thorns’ recalling Christ’s death and the crown of thorns that was placed on his head.⁸⁸⁶ MacLean’s salt rose and terrible leaved rose serve the same function; to show both the light and dark inherent in this symbol of rebirth, beauty and hope. The salt rose also symbolises the tears and sweat and ‘an dubh-chosnadh’ of those oppressed throughout history. ‘An Cuilithionn’ reveals the balance of death and rebirth that is inherent in the rose since a great part of the poem is taken up with descriptions of human pain and suffering before the vision of hope of the rising sun is glimpsed at the end.

Although it is the red rose of heroic sacrifice on which I have mainly focussed my study in this chapter, other types of the symbol of the rose exist in the poem. It is clear that MacLean saw the rose as multi-faceted and capable of supporting the many aspects of his poetic vision:

Ròs dubh a’ Chuilithinn ghuinich
 dearg le fuil cridhe ’n duine;
 ròs ciar na h-eanchainne glaise
 dearg le tuar na fala braise;
 ròs geal tuigse nan saoi

⁸⁸⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 126.

⁸⁸⁶ Hyde, <<http://www.clemson.edu/caah/cedp/Ireland%20PDFs/Hyde.pdf>> {25/01/06}

dearg leis an fhuil gun chlaoidh;
 ròs dearg misneachd nan laoch
 thar mullach shléibhtean 'na chaoir.⁸⁸⁷

He refers to 'ròs ciar' as being like the grey brain filled with the blood of passion – it is possible to link this to the intellect or brain of Lenin and the political passion that is inherent in this image throughout the poem. 'Ròs geal tuigse nan saoi' is also mentioned and has a purer and more spiritual quality which MacLean relates to 'fhuil gun chlaoidh'. This can be taken to mean the higher thoughts of the philosophers who are untouched by the struggles of mankind. The black rose mentioned in the stanza above is relevant to the subject of heroic sacrifice. Róisín Dubh - the little black rose - was a traditional name for Ireland, used by poets who often called for sacrifice in Ireland's name and the black rose of the Cuillin is subtly reminiscent of it. The mountain is envisioned by MacLean as a dark rose of rock within the landscape and the blood that fills it is the blood of man's heart - he is linked to his native land with the love and pride that he has for it in his heart. It highlights the poet's relationship to his homeland and his unwavering devotion to it and further emphasises the connection between self-sacrifice and the dying and reviving god or hero whose cycle of death and rebirth can be linked back to nature and its cycles. Each of the roses has a place in MacLean's poem and their differing qualities are balanced within Maclean's overall poetic vision.

Conclusion

In 'An Cuilithionn' there is a cycle of sacrifice, death and rebirth of the hero which I have chosen to highlight by employing Northrop Frye's theories in *Anatomy of Criticism*. This cyclical model of death and renewal is a recurring motif throughout literature but in the early twentieth century it was given new life in the form of the Irish political rebel as Christ-like hero, sacrificing himself for a cause and giving the land hope due to his actions. In this chapter I have gone some way to highlighting this pattern of movement by discussing MacLean's use of symbols such as mythic figures and the rose. It would be tempting to view this mythic paradigm as solely connected to literature but I have also shown, using the Irish Literary Renaissance and the Easter Rising as a case study that the spiritual can exist beside the political and that in some instances the spiritual dimension is important if hope is to emerge especially within radical politics. Northrop Frye's mythic model, with its emphasis on

⁸⁸⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 126.

the land, its seasons and cycles and how this relates to human journeying and movement fits well with a Gaelic poet such as Sorley MacLean, whose poetry is so firmly embedded in his native landscape. MacLean's Socialist ideals are of utmost importance to the themes in 'An Cuilithionn' but nevertheless he could not help but be attracted to religious-sacrificial imagery as a way to express the cyclical journey of the hero. However, it is entirely possible that these elements are not as diverse as they at first appear⁸⁸⁸ - like James Connolly before him, MacLean's Socialism met and mingled with the underlying belief system of heroic sacrifice and rebirth which was familiar to the European literati of the time. While many hardline Socialists viewed the mixing of Nationalism and Socialism as dubious, in relation to poetry these various symbols add to the richness of 'An Cuilithionn'. In the poem differing belief systems and figures who would otherwise be irreconcilable are able to meet on the mountain-top and this forms the crux of the whole poem. MacLean's poetic journey from death to rebirth is able to incorporate the personal and the political as well as other elements of polarity, the meaning of which will be explored in the remainder of this thesis.

⁸⁸⁸ For a discussion of mythic paradigms from a political perspective see Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981). His study takes the form of a Marxist revision of Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* and shows that politics is not necessarily exempt from myth criticism and that the theme of deliverance also resonates with Socialism.

Chapter 7

The Politics of Striving: Creative Genius in 'An Cuilithionn'

Introduction

In Chapter 5 I explored the idea of self-sacrifice mainly in relation to the political-literary movement in Ireland which preceded the Scottish Renaissance and Sorley MacLean's own work. The legacy of this movement can be traced in MacLean's symbolism in 'An Cuilithionn'. I have suggested that politics are often not entirely separate from symbolism and literature and in this chapter I intend to expand on this premise. I have already looked at how a figure such as James Connolly attempted to balance a Socialist outlook with his own personal set of beliefs and symbols and I will now examine in more detail how MacLean pursues the same goal in 'An Cuilithionn'. To undertake such a study it will be necessary to move from the Irish material to the Soviet references which are far more overt in the text, mainly due to the fact that it was this strain of politics which MacLean was closely engaging with during the late 1930s and early 1940s. The same theme of heroic self-sacrifice exists in relation to Lenin and other Communist figures but I will consider it through references to Hugh MacDiarmid's work employed by MacLean in the poem as opposed to the Yeatsian perspective alluded to in the previous chapter.

Irish poets could be described as commenting on and, in some cases, participating in Irish political events and in certain ways Hugh MacDiarmid fulfilled the same function in relation to Scottish politics. However, due to the international standpoint of Communism MacDiarmid's political poetry was always going to be more outward-looking and less focussed on specific Scottish events - even when the Scottish character and cultural dynamics are explored in his poetry they are always related back to the wider perspective of mankind as a whole. MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn' also assumes this course. There are a few instances in 'An Cuilithionn' in which MacLean mentions MacDiarmid but perhaps nowhere is the presence of MacDiarmid more noticeable than at the end of Part V where Sorley MacLean inserts four stanzas of a translation into Gaelic of Hugh MacDiarmid's poem, 'If there are bounds to any man'. The adaptation of this poem is the only one of its kind throughout 'An

Cuilithionn’ – other poems are mentioned and alluded to in subtler ways but in no other part of the poem is another poet’s work presented in full. For this reason it is clear that MacDiarmid’s poem is important to the subject matter of ‘An Cuilithionn’, particularly in relation to the themes that are already dealt with in Part V. MacLean’s admiration for MacDiarmid’s poem is evident when he writes on an early manuscript of ‘An Cuilithionn’:

The translation follows the metre of the original and is almost literal. I hope I have not abused a poem I think much of.
Translation will be fully acknowledged as in MacDiarmid’s adaptation from Blok etc...⁸⁸⁹

‘If there are bounds to any man’ was included in MacDiarmid’s collection of poems entitled *Second Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems*⁸⁹⁰, which was first published in 1935, and it deals with the striving of mankind to fulfil its ultimate potential. It is no coincidence that Lenin is a figure of great significance to both MacDiarmid and MacLean, and MacDiarmid’s Socialist themes and outlook must be taken into consideration in order for ‘If there are bounds to any man’ to be understood in its proper context. In this chapter I intend to study MacDiarmid’s poem in relation to ‘An Cuilithionn’, considering the possible reasons for its inclusion by MacLean and assessing how it accentuates MacLean’s own message. I will look at MacLean’s political symbols including Lenin and Prometheus within the context of this ‘striving’ of mankind, taking into consideration the concepts of materialism and idealism. Despite materialism and idealism being complete opposites in philosophical terms, both MacLean and MacDiarmid explore ideas relating to these terms in their poetry, especially in relation to Socialism. The way these concepts are handled by MacLean in the poem may lead to a fuller understanding of MacLean’s political views as well as his own personal identity as shown in ‘An Cuilithionn’.

7.1 Interpretations of ‘If there are bounds to any man’

‘If there are bounds to any man’ is a poem about mankind’s potential. In the first stanza MacDiarmid writes:

If there are bounds to any man
Save those himself has set
To far horizons they’re postponed
And none have reached them yet;⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁹ MS 29559, NLS, f. 92.

⁸⁹⁰ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, pp. 535-565.

⁸⁹¹ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 555.

In other words, if he did not limit himself man's potential for achievement would be endless. In the second stanza MacDiarmid blames man's 'own sloth' for the fact that most people 'keep a petty groove'.⁸⁹² The poem views the 'eternal hills' as the place where mankind should be striving to reach its goals and the poem ends on an optimistic note:

All Earth's high peaks are naked stone
And so must men forego
All they can shed – and that's all else! –
Proportionate heights to show.⁸⁹³

The poem is essentially optimistic because MacDiarmid has not given up hope – he fully believes that mankind is capable of great things and he puts faith in men that they will reach the 'heights'. This attitude is also echoed by George Campbell Hay in his poem, 'Dleasnas nan Àirdean', which was written in the early 1940s.⁸⁹⁴ The similar ideas and use of mountain symbolism raises the possibility that this was a more widespread vision among the Scottish poets of this era. A direct line of influence from MacLean to Hay can be surmised when another of Hay's poems, 'Prìosan Dha fhèin an Duine?' is viewed:

A bheil nì nach biodh air chomas da
ach cothrom a thoirt dhà,
is a bhuadhan uile còmhlà ann
a' còrdadh 'nan co-fhàs?

It is highly possible that MacDiarmid was influencing both Gaelic poets. MacDiarmid's optimism in 'If there are bounds to any man' may be tinged with a Socialist viewpoint as to what one may find on the peaks, but he does not make obvious what it is that mankind is actually striving for – it is unclear whether the potential is political, social or metaphysical. There are some clues to its nature in stanza three when he writes:

Preferring ease to energy
Soft lives to steel-like wills,
And mole heaps of morality
To the eternal hills.⁸⁹⁵

This section in particular is very much akin to MacLean's description of the bourgeoisie drowning in the morass in Part III of 'An Cuilithionn'; they are incapable of reaching the height of the Cuillin because of their position in the bog since once the bog takes hold, it is difficult for people to extricate themselves from it. Thus, if this sort of fate is to be avoided, a

⁸⁹² Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 555.

⁸⁹³ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 555.

⁸⁹⁴ Byrne, 2003, p. 102.

⁸⁹⁵ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 555.

‘steel-like’ will is important in mankind’s journey according to MacDiarmid, and yet he puts less stock by morality. In the poem he views morality as holding men back. This view is typical of MacDiarmid; the whole of *Second Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* is permeated with MacDiarmid’s need to develop mankind’s consciousness ‘beyond the rational and empirical, beyond even (as he puts it in ‘Second Hymn to Lenin’) ‘A that’s material and moral’ until we find ‘oor new state descried.’’⁸⁹⁶ Ross suggests that the idea of developing consciousness beyond the ‘moral’ is a Nietzschean notion in which mankind must aspire to superhuman proportions.⁸⁹⁷ Anne Edwards Boutelle points out that this vision of MacDiarmid’s did not just surface in later poems. As far back as 1923 in *Annals of the Five Senses* MacDiarmid wanted to join the present moment to eternity and man to something beyond what was human.⁸⁹⁸ For the poet, this had to be achieved at any cost even if standard ‘moral’ attitudes of mankind had to be transcended in the process. The achievement of the ‘eternal hills’ that MacDiarmid mentions in ‘If there are bounds to any man’ cannot be reached with anything other than revolutionary thought. This is why he was moved towards supporting Communism. In 1957 he summed up his opinions by revealing that Communism was, in his mind, the only way to achieve ‘new kingdoms of the Spirit’:

I am a Communist because life is always, and has always been, individual. There is no question of a universal, because any attempt at definition of life must start out with the concept “individual”, otherwise it would not be life. And Communism, I am convinced, is the only guarantee of individuality in the modern world... Socialist society alone offers a firm guarantee that the interests of the individual will be guaranteed. One must begin with the individual, whether the peculiar genius of a country or the peculiar genius of a man.⁸⁹⁹

MacDiarmid was interested in issues regarding social problems that Communism hoped to eradicate but he was even more interested in the Marxist vision of a ‘New Jerusalem’ where man would be freed from the things that stop his growth.⁹⁰⁰ ‘Second Hymn to Lenin’ is thus a complementary poem to ‘If there are bounds to any man’. It was first published in 1932 in T.S. Eliot’s *The Criterion*, before being published again as the title poem in a collection in

⁸⁹⁶ Raymond Ross, ‘“Oneness of Concept”: MacDiarmid and Empirio-Criticism’ in *Hugh MacDiarmid: Man and Poet* ed. by Nancy K. Gish (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992) pp. 89-108 (p. 92).

⁸⁹⁷ Ross, 1992, p. 92.

⁸⁹⁸ Boutelle, 1980, p. 196.

⁸⁹⁹ Boutelle, 1980, p. 197.

⁹⁰⁰ Boutelle, 1980, p. 198.

1935. It is not really a ‘hymn’ to Lenin in the strict sense of the word; it is in fact a hymn to poetry itself. Alan Bold describes it as ‘a pugnacious statement of MacDiarmid’s conviction that poetry is the supreme creative achievement of mankind.’⁹⁰¹ It is also a device enabling MacDiarmid to create a link between himself and Lenin. In one of the poem’s most important and much quoted parts he writes:

Oh, it’s nonsense, nonsense, nonsense,
Nonsense at this time o’ day
That breid and butter problems
S’ud be in ony man’s way...⁹⁰²

MacDiarmid wanted to remove the ‘breid and butter’ problems in order for man’s potential to be exercised. In *Lucky Poet* he makes it clear that this was his main reason for following Communism:

If Communism did not mean *that*...if it only meant raising the economic level of everybody until it was as high as that of the wealthiest man in the world today, I would not move a little finger to assist in the process.⁹⁰³

The central theme of many of MacDiarmid’s political poems including ‘Second Hymn’ is not politics but ‘the evolution of self and race, the creative movement of life’.⁹⁰⁴ Nancy Gish suggests that for MacDiarmid ‘politics is a method, not a goal.’⁹⁰⁵ This standpoint of MacDiarmid’s does not necessarily disagree with mainstream Communist thinking. Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875), Engels’ *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880), and Lenin’s *The State and Revolution* (1918) all advocate social ownership as a way of expanding human experience and culture.⁹⁰⁶ However, in ‘Second Hymn’ MacDiarmid exclaims in the last stanza:

Unremittin’, relentless,
Organised to the last degree,
Ah, Lenin, politics is bairns’ play
To what this maun be!⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰¹ Bold, 1988, p. 275.

⁹⁰² Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 325.

⁹⁰³ Hugh MacDiarmid, *Lucky Poet: A Self-Study in Literature and Political Ideas, Being the Autobiography of Hugh MacDiarmid* (Christopher Murray Grieve) (London: Methuen, 1943) p. 237.

⁹⁰⁴ Gish, 1984, p.131.

⁹⁰⁵ Gish, 1984, p. 131

⁹⁰⁶ David Craig, ‘MacDiarmid: The Marxist Poet’ in *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Festschrift* ed. by K.D. Duval and Sydney Goodsir Smith (Edinburgh: Duval, 1962) pp. 87-99 (p. 88).

⁹⁰⁷ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 328.

This statement is difficult to align with the official standpoint of Communism which viewed the political sphere as being of major importance to mankind's progression. Babette Deutsch attempts to reconcile MacDiarmid with Communism by interpreting 'poetry' in 'Second Hymn' as the whole of the human imaginative faculty.⁹⁰⁸ Although this is a fair point and it is highly likely that MacDiarmid viewed poetry on a vast scale of this sort, David Craig cautions against stretching terms in this way, pointing out that if 'politics' was treated in the same way it could just as easily come to represent the whole human social organisation.⁹⁰⁹

It is clear that MacDiarmid was not afraid to move away from traditional Communism when the need took him and that while he respected Lenin he was addressing him in the poem almost as an equal. This differs from his treatment of Lenin in 'First Hymn to Lenin' in which Lenin is described as a hero figure just as Dostoevsky and Christ had previously been described in 'A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle'.⁹¹⁰ In 'First Hymn' MacDiarmid goes as far as to state Lenin marked 'the greatest turnin'-point since' Christ.⁹¹¹ Lenin was viewed as the heroic saviour of mankind who changed history to make life better for the masses. In 'Second Hymn' MacDiarmid still shows respect for Lenin – he is described as the 'barbarian saviour o' civilization'⁹¹² – but MacDiarmid's focus has moved on to how he can mirror the genius of Lenin in poetic as opposed to political terms. This variance in MacDiarmid's politics shows that he was capable of changing his mind and of being inconsistent, especially when he wanted to highlight specific views in his poetry. He wanted to reach as many people as Lenin had done in the political sphere and the poetry had not only to reach people but also be of a high quality and seriousness:

Nae simple rhymes for silly folk
But the haill art, as Lenin gied
Nae Marx-without-tears to workin' men
But the fu' course instead.⁹¹³

As Catherine Kerrigan puts it, for MacDiarmid 'poetry has to make itself the equal of

⁹⁰⁸ Craig, 1962, p. 95.

⁹⁰⁹ Craig, 1962, p. 95.

⁹¹⁰ Kerrigan, 1983, p. 162.

⁹¹¹ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 297.

⁹¹² Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 324.

⁹¹³ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 325.

‘Lenin’s vision’ by setting out to achieve...works of depth and breadth’.⁹¹⁴ ‘Genius’ is the key theme in the poem – Lenin and MacDiarmid both strive for the ‘haill art’ and for MacDiarmid, this genius is what will take mankind from how it is in the present to how it could be in the future. Genius is the symbol of the poet’s paradoxical vision of humanity.⁹¹⁵ MacDiarmid is fully aware that suffering may take place in order for this vision to be fully realised.⁹¹⁶ In ‘If there are bounds to any man’ the potential of mankind is only achieved if man is willing to pay the price for it – energy must be expended for this to happen. Other poems in the collection carry the same meaning. In ‘Lo! A Child is Born’ a better future i.e. Communism is brought into the world in the form of a woman giving birth in a house full of waiting people:

The walls were full of ears. All voices were lowered.
Only the mother had the right to groan or complain.⁹¹⁷

This birth would certainly not be painless but the result would be worth it and MacDiarmid calls for the world to receive Communism with the same warmth that greets the birth of a child:

Then I thought of the whole world. Who cares for its travail
And seeks to encompass it in like loving kindness and peace?
...
...the future fumbles,
A bad birth, not like the child in that gracious home
Heard in the quietness turning in its mother’s womb,
A strategic mind already, seeking the best way
To present himself to life...⁹¹⁸

In this poem, as with the others I have looked at, MacDiarmid wants a sense of genius to be revealed and for man to take up the challenge of rising to its heights.

7.2 MacLean’s Poetry of Human Suffering – Relationships Between the Individual and Collective

There can be little doubt of Sorley MacLean’s admiration for the genius of Lenin when both his poetry and his letters to Douglas Young are taken into consideration. In a letter to

⁹¹⁴ Kerrigan, 1983, p. 165.

⁹¹⁵ Boutelle, 1980, p. 205.

⁹¹⁶ Boutelle, 1980, p. 205.

⁹¹⁷ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 548.

⁹¹⁸ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 548.

Young dated 6th October 1942, he writes:

The Bolshevik achievement in the past twenty years must be unparalleled morally, just as it is perhaps unparalleled physically. It is I think by far the greatest thing hitherto recorded in history that the courage, self sacrifice and achievement of a non-theistic, non pie-in-the-sky, humanist optimism should completely overshadow the courage and self-sacrifice engendered by the German inferiority complex neurosis and all other myths.⁹¹⁹

In ‘An Cuilithionn’ Lenin is a symbol of the Bolshevik achievement and of the sort of ‘genius’ that MacLean is describing in the letter above. In Part V, directly before the inclusion of ‘If there are bounds to any man’ MacLean writes:

Tha O Conghaile an Eirinn
ag éirigh thar amhghair
MacGill-Eain an Albainn
'na chalbh air na h-àirdean,
Liebknecht sa Ghearmailt,
marbh ach neo-bhàsmhor,
is Lenin an Ruisia,
ceann-uidhe nan sàr-bhreith.⁹²⁰

It is significant that Lenin is included in a roll-call of MacLean’s heroes, especially as this comes before MacDiarmid’s poem about mankind and its potential. These figures are examples of men who strove, often against the odds, for what they believed in – essentially they believed in the furthering of the growth and development of humanity. MacDiarmid’s poem in the next stanzas is a perfect way to finish Part V – MacLean is using it as a way to underline what can happen if people follow the lead of the likes of James Connolly, John MacLean, Liebknecht and Lenin. Interestingly, all of these men are Socialists which further highlights the point that MacDiarmid makes in *Second Hymn to Lenin and Other Poems* – that Socialism/Communism is the only way forward for mankind. The Gaelic in the quotation above is particularly rich and the English translation cannot have the same depth of meaning. ‘is Lenin an Ruisia,/ ceann-uidhe nan sàr-bhreith’ is translated as ‘and Lenin in Russia,/ where great judgements go.’⁹²¹ ‘Ceann-uidhe’ can mean destination or an end of a journey⁹²² and if ‘ceann-uidhe’ is referring to Lenin, the Gaelic adds more weight to MacLean’s admiration of Lenin since MacLean may have been operating on a level which takes into

⁹¹⁹ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

⁹²⁰ MacLean, 1999, pp. 102-104.

⁹²¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 104.

⁹²² Dwelly, 1994, p. 180.

consideration the traditional Gaelic role of the bard who praises his chief. Wilson McLeod and Meg Bateman point out that the panegyric poetry composed by the bard fulfilled ‘key social functions, expressing and reiterating shared values.’⁹²³ The chief’s household would be, quite literally, the bard’s destination if he was under the patronage of a specific chief. It is possible that MacLean envisages Lenin in the role of chief, at the centre of his ‘clan’, while MacLean’s own role is to highlight the values and beliefs that the ‘clan’ shares.

In another part of ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean writes:

’S mise Clio an t-saoghail;
chunnaic mise móran saothrach:
mheal mi bochdainn còmh ri Lenin
agus ri muillionan cheana.⁹²⁴

MacLean is showing another aspect of Lenin in this stanza. He makes it clear that Lenin’s principles and his great mind do not make him exempt from suffering. In fact, it is highly likely that he is suffering *because* of his ideals. Again, this fits very well with the message in ‘If there are bounds to any man’ and may go some way to explaining MacLean’s admiration for MacDiarmid’s poem and the reason for its inclusion. The poem does not state that striving for a better future will be easy – men ‘must forego/ all they can shed’⁹²⁵ to reach the heights. MacLean’s mention of certain types of roses can be linked to intellect and the brain and by extension the qualities that he sees as inherent in Lenin. There is life-blood present in these roses, thus showing that MacLean sees intellect as being connected to passion:

ròs ciar na h-eanchainne glaise
dearg le tuar na fala braise;
ròs geal tuigse nan saoi
dearg leis an fhuil gun chlaoidh;

If the rose is generally viewed as a symbol of sacrifice, MacLean is underlining the point that politics comes with its own promise of sacrifice and difficulties if the political vision is to be realised. The overall message in ‘An Cuilithionn’ is very similar to MacDiarmid’s vision – the sufferings of heroes throughout history are listed by Clio in Part VI⁹²⁶ and in Part VII Christ, Prometheus and Spartacus are all used as symbols of suffering and sacrifice while also

⁹²³ *Duanair na Sracaire/ Songbook of the Pillagers: Anthology of Scotland’s Gaelic Verse to 1600*, ed. by Wilson McLeod and Meg Bateman (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2007) p. xxxv.

⁹²⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 122

⁹²⁵ Grieve and Aitken, 1978, p. 555.

⁹²⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 110-119.

being used as symbols of what men are capable of achieving beyond the suffering.⁹²⁷ In Part VI MacLean alludes to MacDiarmid's poem once more when he states:

Ma tha crìoch air a cur roimh neach
ach ise chuir e fhéin,
's ma ràinig duine beò i,
gun d' fhairich i do cheum.⁹²⁸

In other words, those that walk on the heights of the mountains are the people who have surpassed their limits - it is clear that this is the reason why the likes of Christ, Dimitrov, Spartacus, Lenin and Prometheus are seen on the mountain. They are men who have surpassed normal levels of human courage, strength and sacrifice.

MacLean's poetic ideas are reinforced in his letters to Young. In a letter dated 6th December 1940, he expresses the opinion that:

The intellectual who feels what I consider must be the evolutionary urge to change the world is I am afraid in for a hell of a time at any rate. For the merely contemplative 'intellectual' or 'aesthete' I have never had much care or sympathy.⁹²⁹

For MacLean, emotion and suffering go hand in hand with the need to change the world. In another letter on 22nd February 1941 he comes very close to MacDiarmid's own line of thought in 'Second Hymn' when he writes that:

When one thinks of the millions of people who have no political interests and who wish only to live as they may it makes one wonder whether those impelled by an evolutionary urge to better the world should expose those millions to such horrors for any end at all and whether the complete pacifist is not justified. I myself can only work it out by thinking that the sum of human suffering is not greater than the suffering of one individual, that thence human suffering in wars does not matter more than the inevitable suffering even of a comparative few and that therefore the evolutionary urge must work itself out even with the deaths of thousands of kulaks or of western European people of high and low place.⁹³⁰

The phrase 'the evolutionary urge must work itself out' is significant – MacLean was obviously trying hard to grasp issues connected to revolutionaries fighting to change the world and the idea that this process was evolutionary corresponds with the Socialist view that

⁹²⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 121.

⁹²⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 118.

⁹²⁹ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

⁹³⁰ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

as mankind develops it grows closer to the ideal of a world in which every person is equal. He writes again of this on 14th June 1941 – ‘I find it now impossible to allow my feelings to be affected proportionately to the increase in the sum of human suffering. One must have some kind of individualist escapism such as that all human suffering is no greater than that of one individual.’⁹³¹ Perhaps the reason he found these issues so difficult is that he was trying to align a humanist view of the world with his artistic ideals that one must suffer if something worthwhile is to be achieved. When this translates into real war and human struggle the results are far more difficult to comprehend and by the time MacLean was writing these letters from Catterick Camp the effects of war were all too real for him. It was one thing to work with symbols of sacrifice in poetry but, as he shows in his letters, quite another thing to strive for the advancement of mankind’s potential in reality. These letters show MacLean’s struggle with idealism. ‘If there are bounds to any man’ can be viewed as an idealistic poem in the sense that the fulfilment of an idea must be achieved at all costs. MacLean’s inclusion of this poem into a part of ‘An Cuilithionn’ already so rich in ideal figures and symbols of strength, courage, self-sacrifice and hope is no accident. I think that at the root of this is a paradoxical relationship between philosophical idealism and materialism which plays itself out in ‘An Cuilithionn’. In a diary entry (1932) in a notebook from his university days MacLean discusses the importance of the ideal:

Devotion to an ideal is the only thing that justifies life, that gives it a saviour, makes it worth living, to live by a flame within us, is truly to live.⁹³²

In 1932 he also writes in his diary:

...there are too many glib people who assume an understanding of the intimate tangle of life. Life is too complex for that. We, at least we of the post-war generation can see no comprehensive solution to its problems. The only positive thing left to us is intellectual honesty and it is this quality that prevents us from drawing final conclusions.⁹³³

Thus, it can be seen that as far back as 1932 MacLean was well aware of the difficulties of attempting to align philosophies and draw ‘final conclusions’. He was fully conscious of the possible dichotomy between the mind and the heart and it is this that he uses as a central idea in ‘An Cuilithionn’ and on which his understanding of his own identity is based.⁹³⁴ The

⁹³¹ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

⁹³² MS 29621, NLS, f. 32.

⁹³³ MS 29621, NLS, f. 34. ‘Post-war generation’ is referring to 1914-1918.

⁹³⁴ See also *Dàin do Eimhir II*, MacLean, 1999, pp. 4-6. This poem deals with the same themes and it also dates from the same period (1932).

figures that he uses in his poem could be viewed as idealistic and yet in many instances they could easily be placed in a realistic material setting. Using the content of Part V including ‘If there are bounds to any man’ as a starting point, in the remainder of this chapter I plan to look further into ‘An Cuilithionn’ at MacLean’s symbols, studying the relationship between the hero and the collective as well as placing the idealist/materialist debate in context with MacLean’s own world view.

7.3 Prometheus

7.3.1 Prometheus As Envisioned by Classical Writers

At the beginning of Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean appears to answer the challenge set at the end of Part V by ‘If there are bounds to any man’:

ach cha dànaig àm riamh
 ’s nach d’fhuair uachdarain dia
 a chrochadh air na beanntan cràbhach
 colann iobairt nan sàr-fhear.⁹³⁵

By stating that ‘cheusadh ioma Crìosda/ an uiridh agus am bliadhna’⁹³⁶ MacLean is asserting that men are still willing to die for the causes that they believe in by sacrificing themselves. He uses Dimitrov’s stand against the Nazis as an example of how good can prevail and how evil can be defeated if man surpasses his bounds:

agus chunnaic mise leumraich
 air sliabh a’ Chuilithinn le éibhneas
 ri faicinn Dimitrov 'na aonar
 a’ toirt air an spiorad dhaonda
 leum as a chochull le faoisgneadh
 gu stad analach an t-saoghail.
 Anns an stad ud bhàsaich diathan
 aosda bùird easach crìona,⁹³⁷

MacLean continues his theme of the Cuillin and eternal hills of the spirit as his poetic landscape but the theme is given a new perspective by the presence of the myth of Prometheus in Part VII. The mountain as the destination of heroes changes from the Cuillin to the Caucasus and the evil of the world is symbolised by vultures. The role of Prometheus himself is now seen by MacLean to be inclusive of the whole of the suffering of mankind:

’S ioma car a chuir an saoghal
 on chunnaic Aeschylus aogas
 suinn-dé-duine crochte màbte

⁹³⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

⁹³⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

⁹³⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

air Caucasus nan sgorra gàbhaidh:
 an dia fhuair dealbh air cruth daonda,
 Iupiter borb, le iadach claoine
 A' cur nam biatach acrach mùinte
 A shracadh 's a dh'ithe ghrùdhain:
 An cinne-daonna air na creagan
 A' ceusadh anama fhéin ri sgreadan
 Nan eun is nam brùidean fiadhaich
 A fhuair an toirt fhéin on bhiathadh.⁹³⁸

MacLean's use of the Prometheus myth as a motif is quite prolonged in Part VII – he returns to the symbol of the vulture when discussing his 'love'.⁹³⁹ She attacks him in the form of a vulture so it is clear that it was a myth that resonated greatly within him. In the quotation above it seems that he has cast Jupiter as the power of capitalism and fascism thus bringing an ancient Greek myth into a modern setting that has relevance for his own times. This is not an unusual device – Carol Dougherty has pointed out that the richness of the Prometheus myth has ensured that it can be replayed again and again throughout the centuries depending on man's needs at specific times.⁹⁴⁰ Prometheus was the Greek Titan who defied Zeus and stole fire for humankind thus giving them knowledge and a means of survival. Many writers including Hesiod, Aeschylus and Aesop have retold the story in ancient times but it is interesting that it is Aeschylus that MacLean chooses to mention in relation to the myth. This may simply be due to MacLean's familiarity with this specific version of the myth. However, because each writer accesses Prometheus from a different angle depending on what he wants to highlight, it is important to look specifically at Aeschylus's retelling in some detail.

Aeschylus's drama, *Prometheus Bound*, was composed in order to celebrate fifth-century Athens as a place of prosperity and power. According to Dougherty his story highlights progress rather than decline as the master narrative of the human condition.⁹⁴¹ The play begins with Zeus' agents, Kratos (Might) and Bia (Force) forcing Hephaestus to bind Prometheus to a rocky crag. When Prometheus is left alone he describes to his audience the reason that he is there is because he stole fire from Zeus to give to mankind. Ocean and his daughters enter

⁹³⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

⁹³⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 122. 'Chaidh mo ghaol liom air a'bheinn/ fiach an cluinneadh i an t-seinn/ a bha air stùcan nan ceum gàbhaidh;/ chual is leth-thuig i 'm mànrán/ agus air ball bha cruth na biataich/ air a bòidhche ghil chianail/ agus 's ann tholl i mo chliathaich.'

⁹⁴⁰ Carol Dougherty, *Prometheus* (London: Routledge, 2006) p. 3.

⁹⁴¹ Dougherty, 2006, p. 65.

and they commiserate with Prometheus. Ocean offers him help if he promises to become less outspoken. When he refuses to comply Ocean storms off and the daughters of Ocean lament Zeus' treatment of Prometheus.⁹⁴² Prometheus then gives speeches about all he has done for mankind:

First, then, although they had the power of sight,
 Their vision was of no avail to them,
 Although they heard, no meaning did they grasp;
 But, like the shadowy forms that people dream,
 Throughout the lengthy period of their lives
 They kept confounding all objective things.
 (...)
 ...And metals, useful to mankind,
 Which lay concealed beneath the rocky ground,
 Gold, silver, copper, iron – who could say
 That he before myself discovered them?
 No one, I trow, who doth not idly boast.
 In one compendious sentence learn the whole:
 All arts to mortals known are from Prometheus.⁹⁴³

The quotation above is from a lengthy speech in which Prometheus shows all of the technological expertise that he has given man. After this, Io, who is forced by Zeus to walk the earth stung by a gadfly, enters and Prometheus tells her that she will bear a son, Heracles, who will liberate Prometheus. He also tells her that Zeus will make a marriage in which his wife will bear a son who will be stronger than Zeus. Hermes, Zeus' messenger, appears and demands that Prometheus shares this secret knowledge. When Prometheus refuses to do this Hermes tells him that a new punishment will come upon him in which eagles will devour his flesh daily. The play ends with Prometheus taking a defiant stance and uttering the words 'The Light that unto all who live belongs,/ Dost thou behold me, crushed by cruel wrongs?'⁹⁴⁴ Dougherty points out that Aeschylus' s play sets up a powerful opposition between Zeus and Prometheus. Dougherty suggests that Aeschylus cast Prometheus as a political rebel with Zeus embodying the aspects associated with tyranny – in a 'political context, Zeus' punishment of Prometheus takes on the perspective of recent history' with the reality of tyrannical regimes.⁹⁴⁵ Prometheus' s defiance shows that he assumes the role of rebel for mankind against the oppression of the gods. For Aeschylus, this myth is not just a story of

⁹⁴² A good overview of the plot of *Prometheus Bound* is given in Dougherty, 2006, p. 67.

⁹⁴³ James Morgan Pryse, *A New Presentation of the Prometheus Bound of Aischylos* (London: John M. Watkins, 1925) pp. 38-40.

⁹⁴⁴ Pryse, 1925, p. 76.

⁹⁴⁵ Dougherty, 2006, p. 72.

technological progress but a celebration of hope. Hope is the first thing that Prometheus says that he gave to mankind – although fire opens up mankind’s eyes to the teaching of crafts and metalworking it is hope that ultimately helps people to cope with the future.⁹⁴⁶ Dougherty writes that ‘hope is part of the human experience – another thing that separates mankind from the omniscient gods.’⁹⁴⁷ In the context of ‘An Cuilithionn’ it is understandable that Prometheus is an ideal symbol for MacLean since hope rises with the Cuillin at the end of the poem in the form of Socialism. Suffering is also a major concern for MacLean throughout his poem and like many of the other heroic figures mentioned in ‘An Cuilithionn’ Prometheus battles against an authoritarian regime and his rebelliousness comes at a price – in order to further mankind’s potential by giving them fire Prometheus becomes a scapegoat and, due to his actions, suffers the miseries of mankind. The striving for improvement in the Prometheus myth and the suffering that this striving can bring resonates with ‘If there are bounds to any man’ and shows that MacLean viewed these themes as important to the overall message of ‘An Cuilithionn’. In the remaining part of this chapter I will explore in more detail who the symbol of Prometheus represents in MacLean’s modern spectrum of heroes.

7.3.2 The Romantic Prometheus

The Prometheus myth was not just used by Classical writers. If MacLean’s vision of Prometheus is to be fully understood it is also necessary to look at the Romantic poets’ treatment of the sacrificial hero. In Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean mentions Percy Bysshe Shelley in relation to the same story:

Thuirt Shelley gun do chlisg am mullach
Caucasach ri pian a’ churaidh,⁹⁴⁸

MacLean is referring to Shelley’s epic poem ‘Prometheus Unbound’ in which Shelley describes how the mountain takes on the emotion and suffering of Prometheus:

THE EARTH. I am the Earth,
Thy mother; She within whose stony veins,
(...)
Joy ran, as blood within a living frame,
When thou didst from her bosom, like a cloud
Of glory, arise, a keen spirit of keen joy!
(...)

⁹⁴⁶ Dougherty, 2006, p. 74.

⁹⁴⁷ Dougherty, 2006, p. 75.

⁹⁴⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

Then, see those million worlds which burn and roll
 Around us: their inhabitants beheld
 My sphered light wane in high heaven; the sea
 Was lifted by strange tempest, and new fire
 From earthquake-rifted mountains of bright snow
 Shook its portentous hair beneath Heaven's frown;
 (...)
 (...)and the thin air, my breath, was stained
 With the contagion of a mother's hate
 Breathed on her child's destroyer;⁹⁴⁹

The solipsistic tendency for nature and an individual to become intertwined and mutually affected is typical of the Romantic poets and MacLean is perhaps recognising this when he describes how the Cuillin leapt for joy at Dimitrov's actions – 'agus chunnaic mise leumraich/ air sliabh a' Chuilithinn le éibhneas'.⁹⁵⁰ It is likely that it is actually the people on the mountain peaks who are rising up for joy and not the mountain itself but the Cuillin acts as a natural amphitheatre and the people's emotions are amplified by this landscape which appears to absorb their passion.

At the end of the 18th century poets were looking for figures of rebellion on which to place their own experiences, mainly due to events such as the French Revolution which had given them so much hope and then an equal measure of disappointment. Dougherty stresses the importance that these events would have held for poets such as Byron and Shelley.⁹⁵¹ However, their hopes had been dashed due to 'Napoleonic despotism' and for this reason the Prometheus that they envisioned in their writing had little to do with violent revolt.⁹⁵² Prometheus offered them a way to comprehend a 'tumultuous political world'. Byron took Prometheus as a symbol of himself. In the *Prophecy of Dante* IV 14-16 he writes:

The new Prometheus of new men,
 Bestowing fire from heaven, and then, too late,
 Finding the pleasure given repaid with pain.⁹⁵³

Byron was suffering as a poet due to a public which he felt were unappreciative of his work and who did not understand him – Prometheus's pain was in his eyes familiar to him and he

⁹⁴⁹ *Shelley's Prometheus Unbound: A Variorum Edition*. ed. by Lawrence John Zillman (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1959) pp. 140-142.

⁹⁵⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 120.

⁹⁵¹ Dougherty, 2006, p. 91.

⁹⁵² Dougherty, 2006, p. 96.

⁹⁵³ Dougherty, 2006, p. 97.

celebrated the human experience of resistance and suffering in this way.⁹⁵⁴ Shelley's vision of Prometheus was perhaps more far-reaching than Byron's and has more in common with MacLean's own ideas. In 'Prometheus Unbound' Shelley departs from Aeschylus's story – after thirty thousand years of torture Shelley's Prometheus is willing to put his rebellion behind him and is no longer seeking revenge. In Dougherty's words:

The new Promethean fire is the liberating power of love which can transform the human condition...Shelley's Prometheus is more about imagining an escape from the institution of tyranny than a lament on its limitations. Redeemed by many years of suffering, Shelley's Prometheus has become 'the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest of ends.'⁹⁵⁵

The attainment of this 'highest perfection' is an idea that would be very familiar to both MacDiarmid and MacLean. Both poets were concerned with the individual's struggle to gain something that is just beyond reach. MacLean has something in common with the Romantic poets such as Shelley – while the masses were important to MacLean he realised that change had to start with the individual and his sense of identity in 'An Cuilithionn' is a manifestation of this. Although the poem deals with the masses it is nevertheless MacLean's own personal worldview that takes centre stage. Just as Shelley used Prometheus in his intellectual revolution as a way of releasing himself from the authority of priest and king in order for him to be 'king over himself',⁹⁵⁶ so too does MacLean use Prometheus to gain a better understanding of himself. As a poet with a strong grasp of both the Romantic period and the Protestant emphasis on the individual's personal relationship to the Word, Promethean themes would have been well understood by MacLean. Prometheus is a symbol of all mankind's strivings for political power and self rule – he is the bringer of the fire of creativity and resonates in the minds of poets for this reason. By bringing light he helps humans break free of their constraints, whether political, moral or religious constraints.⁹⁵⁷ In a way the same concept underlies 'If there are bounds to any man' – only when man has broken free of his constraints can he hope for completion and fulfilment of his destiny.

⁹⁵⁴ Dougherty, 2006, p. 97.

⁹⁵⁵ Dougherty, 2006, p. 100.

⁹⁵⁶ Dougherty, 2006, p. 104.

⁹⁵⁷ Dougherty, 2006, p. 115.

7.3.3 Prometheus and Marxist Thought

The Prometheus myth can be seen to be firmly embedded in the overall message of ‘An Cuilithionn’ when the figure of Lenin is considered. Lenin is a manifestation of the type of heroic figure that is envisioned by MacDiarmid in ‘If there are bounds to any man.’ Both MacDiarmid and MacLean have made it clear in their poetry that Lenin is an inspiration to them and this was not an unusual attitude amongst left-wing poets in the 1930s.⁹⁵⁸ The admiration for Lenin can be traced back to Russia in the early years of the twentieth century where he took on for the people mythic qualities that he himself was certainly uncomfortable with since it did not align with his Communist thinking.⁹⁵⁹ The Russian terrorists who were fighting to overthrow the old order in the early twentieth century had no qualms with portraying themselves as Christ-like figures, sacrificing themselves for a true and noble cause. Egor Sazonov assassinated Vyacheslav Konstaninovich Plehve, minister of internal affairs, in 1904 and claimed ‘I feel that we socialists are continuing the cause of Christ, who preached brotherly love among people and died for the people as a common criminal.’⁹⁶⁰ Religious imagery provided a way for the Russian intelligentsia to find an identity for themselves – the philosopher, Nikolai Berdiaev, described it thus – ‘An apocalyptic mood, and that with a pessimistic tinge, supervened in Russia at the end of the nineteenth century.’⁹⁶¹ The Bolsheviks adopted certain aspects of religious symbolism in order to appeal to the public. *Rassvet* (Dawn) was a Bolshevik magazine that was first published in 1904 and included the Polish workers’ song, ‘Red Banner’, in its first issue. It has at its heart both a Communist and apocalyptic sentiment, combining Marx with St John:⁹⁶²

Down with tyrants! Away with fetters!
 We need not tread old paths of slavery!
 We will show the world a new path,
 Labour will rule the world!⁹⁶³

The Bolsheviks developed an idea called ‘god-building’ which took the religious concept of spiritual regeneration a stage further – it promised a universal development of the human spirit into an ‘All-Spirit’ which was to be at the centre of the revolution.⁹⁶⁴ One of the main exponents of this movement was Anatoly Lunacharsky. Lunacharsky was interested in the

⁹⁵⁸ See Jem Poster, *The Thirties Poets* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993)

⁹⁵⁹ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 90.

⁹⁶⁰ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 17.

⁹⁶¹ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 18.

⁹⁶² Tumarkin, 1997, p. 19.

⁹⁶³ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 20.

⁹⁶⁴ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 21.

philosophical and the aesthetic and referred to himself in his later days as ‘a poet of the revolution’.⁹⁶⁵

It may seem difficult to align religious faith with Communism but the Socialist ‘religious faith’ nevertheless struck a chord with many of the intelligentsia in Russia. In 1904 Lunacharsky describes his vision of a Socialist religion, a deification of human potential:

The faith of an active human being is a faith in mankind of the future; his religion is a combination of the feelings and thoughts which make him a participant in the life of mankind and a link in the chain which extends up to the superman...⁹⁶⁶

This is remarkably similar to MacDiarmid’s ideals in ‘If there are bounds to any man’ – the realization of human potential takes on a spiritual dimension in the quest for fulfilment. Nina Tumarkin points out that it is an irony of history that the god-builders acted to deify human genius in Lenin ‘for whom all religion was anathema and god-building particularly repugnant...’⁹⁶⁷ The Lenin cult which began during Lenin’s lifetime and continued after his death sought to immortalise Lenin and deify mankind. Tumarkin describes this phenomenon as a ‘Promethean impulse’⁹⁶⁸ and it is possible to see why the Promethean label was applied to Lenin by the intelligentsia, peasants and workers, especially considering Prometheus suffered to bring knowledge to the people just as Lenin brought a specifically Socialist knowledge to the world. In many cases Lenin was viewed as a Christ-like figure of cosmic stature. The chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, Zinoviev, published a long address, part of which I have quoted below. It is interesting that the image of swamp and water is very close to the morass described by MacLean in ‘An Cuilithionn’. It could be that such imagery was absorbed into the collective European consciousness as time went on or it is possible that MacLean was exposed to material such as this directly through friends. 200,000 copies of this address were published and it was also made available in French, German and English⁹⁶⁹ so it would have been circulated quite widely:

Someone powerful and strong has disturbed the petty-bourgeois swamp. The movement of the water begins. On the horizon a

⁹⁶⁵ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 20.

⁹⁶⁶ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 21.

⁹⁶⁷ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 23.

⁹⁶⁸ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 22.

⁹⁶⁹ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 301.

new figure has appeared...He is really the chosen one of millions. He is the leader by the grace of God. He is the authentic figure of a leader such as is born once in 500 years in the life of mankind.⁹⁷⁰

The idea of Lenin being linked with Christ continued. On 1st September, two days after an attempted assassination of Lenin, Sosnovsky, a Bolshevik journalist, wrote in *Petrogradskaia Pravda* using the same sort of imagery:

Lenin cannot be killed – Because Lenin is the rising up of the oppressed. Lenin is the fight to the end, to final victory...So long as the proletariat lives – Lenin lives.⁹⁷¹

It is significant that the proletariat was inextricably linked with Lenin in the minds of writers. Lenin became inseparable from the people. M.S. Olminsky, editor of the Moscow Bolshevik daily *Sotsial Demokrat*, encapsulates the prevailing attitude when he writes ‘...to know, to study com. Lenin as a literary and political figure means to know and to study in one individual the colossal revolutionary proletarian collective.’⁹⁷² In this statement there lies the meaning of the Lenin cult. Lenin becomes all-encompassing and eternal – in the writings about Lenin during this period he becomes a total abstraction.⁹⁷³ In *Pravda* (Nov 7, 1923) on the sixth anniversary of the revolution Lenin is:

Not only the name of a beloved leader; it is a program and a tactic...and a philosophical world-view...Lenin is the hatred, the ardent hatred of oppression and the exploitation of man by man...Lenin is the suffering for an idea; it is the bleeding of the proletariat; it is a struggle under the most intolerable conditions...⁹⁷⁴

⁹⁷⁰ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 82. There are a number of parallels between Zinoviev’s imagery and MacLean’s symbols in ‘An Cuilithionn’. Not only is the morass of Maraulin similar to the ‘petty-bourgeois swamp’, the ‘movement of water’ described by Zinoviev is also present in ‘An Cuilithionn’ – ‘Nàile, chì mise bhuan/ onfhaidh a’ chuain gun tràigh;/ chì mi bàrcadh nan stuadh/ agus bàirlinn le gruaim mhóir àird:’ MacLean, 1999, p. 116. The symbol in the poem most connected to water is the Skye Stallion – at times this horse seems to be made up of the surging sea as it jumps from pinnacle to pinnacle – ‘a steud nan cuantan,/ ’s tu th’ air mo bhuaireadh,/ ’s mo chridhe luaineach/ le d’luasgan shùl.’ MacLean, 1999, p. 98. When Zinoviev writes ‘On the horizon a new figure has appeared’ the stallion is brought to mind – ‘Eich mhóir na faire’ MacLean, 1999, p. 100. It is clear that MacLean views the stallion as the hope and future of humanity and, since his greatest hope comes in the form of Socialism, the stallion could be described as a socialist symbol. It is interesting to note that the way in which the Stallion is portrayed – as a thrusting, dramatic figure – is similar in attitude to socialist art such as posters calling for the workers to unite. In one poster from 1920 Lenin is seen with factories behind him. He is pointing an arm outwards and a caption below reads ‘A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of communism’. See Tumarkin, 1997, p. 167. The stallion and forms of socialist art have the same physicality, power and determined energy and I show specific examples of this at the end of Chapter 4.

⁹⁷¹ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 83.

⁹⁷² Tumarkin, 1997, p. 87.

⁹⁷³ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 132.

⁹⁷⁴ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 132.

When quotes such as the ones above are studied in conjunction with the general feeling pervading ‘An Cuilithionn’ a connection can be seen. The Bolsheviks saw Lenin as a genius and MacLean continues this belief in his poem, adding Lenin to the list of heroes that are named in ‘An Cuilithionn’. MacLean was familiar with the application of religious discourse in a Socialist context. While in ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean’s mentions of Lenin and other Socialist heroes take on an almost religious devotion, in *Dàin do Eimhir XVIII* an examination of his conscience from an atheist point of view draws on vocabulary from a Christian context. In this poem, Socialist heroes are also name-checked and praised:

An iarr mi mo chridhe bhith glainte
 bho anfhannachd mo ghaoil ghlain ghil,
 an iarr mi spiorad ’s e air fhaileadh
 eadhon gum faighear anns a’ bhoile mi
 cho treun ri Dimitrov no ri O Conghaile?⁹⁷⁵

The individuals such as Lenin in ‘An Cuilithionn’ embody something that is connected to the eternal, that the poet sees as being part of a collective struggle to fulfil mankind’s potential. Lenin was understandably uneasy about this sort of attitude regarding himself. According to Bonch-Bruevich he voiced the opinion that:

They exaggerate everything, call me a genius, some kind of special person...all our lives we have waged an ideological struggle against the glorification of the personality, of the individual; long ago we settled the problem of heroes. And suddenly here again is a glorification of the individual.⁹⁷⁶

However, I do not think that MacDiarmid and MacLean necessarily wanted to glorify specific individuals for the individual’s own sake. Instead, their vision used the individual as an example in order to reach an all-encompassing state of perfection. The heroic individual was a figure to aspire to in order to further the human spirit. That state of the spirit may not have been reached in its entirety at the end of ‘An Cuilithionn’ but there is a dawning of hope that suggests the state is attainable.

Christ is not the only figure that the Socialists and Communists used as a symbol in their own ideology. Prometheus was also used in certain examples and he was an apt choice when it is taken into consideration that Prometheus was the god who first introduced technology to

⁹⁷⁵ Whyte, 2002, p. 67.

⁹⁷⁶ Tumarkin, 1997, p. 90. Bonch-Bruevich’s account of Lenin’s attitude during this period was first published in 1965. See V.D. Bonch-Bruevich, *Vospominaniia o Lenine* (Moscow: Izd-vo Akademii Nauk, 1965).

humans. Also, once Prometheus had stolen fire to give to mankind Zeus punished mankind by withholding their comfortable existence. For this reason Prometheus also symbolises man's need to work.⁹⁷⁷ By defying Zeus - the god at the top of the Greek pantheon - his attractiveness to Socialists increased since their ideology is against organised religion. Dougherty shows that this idea is only a few steps away from associating Prometheus 'with the role of work in the human experience over the ages – exploitation of workers by management, abusive working conditions, and more.'⁹⁷⁸ Perhaps it was this aspect that led Karl Marx to refer to Prometheus in his early work as 'the first saint and martyr of the philosopher's calendar.'⁹⁷⁹ In *Das Kapital* he appears as a symbol of the proletariat – 'riveted to capital more firmly than the wedges of Hephaestus held Prometheus to the rock.'⁹⁸⁰ Again, it can be seen that the individual i.e. Prometheus is linked to the whole of mankind. Although there are no specific examples of Lenin being likened to Prometheus in the overt way that he is likened to Christ, a cartoon exists which was published in the *Rhineland Gazette* depicting Marx as Prometheus, bound to a printing press with the Prussian eagle gnawing his liver - the Oceanids in the picture become the cities of the Rhineland pleading for freedom.⁹⁸¹ John Lehman, an English poet and magazine editor, in his 1937 book, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks*, continued the Prometheus motif. The book dealt with the Caucasus which was not only the place where Prometheus was chained to the rock but also the contemporary border between the Russian federation, Georgia, and Azerbaijan.⁹⁸² Due to the locations Promethean connections the title was apt but Lehman goes further in his explanation, stating that Prometheus is:

...the oldest symbol of what the Bolsheviks have had as their aim: the deliverance of man from tyranny and barbarism by the seizure of material power.⁹⁸³

⁹⁷⁷ Dougherty, 2006, p. 19.

⁹⁷⁸ Dougherty, 2006, p. 20.

⁹⁷⁹ Dougherty, 2006, p. 132.

⁹⁸⁰ Theodore Ziolkowski, *The Sin of Knowledge: Ancient Themes and Modern Variations* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 115.

⁹⁸¹ Dougherty, 2006, p. 132. See Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works Vol I* (New York: International Publishers, 1975) pp. 374-375 for the cartoon of Marx as Prometheus. The date that they give for the publication of this cartoon is 18th March 1843.

⁹⁸² Dougherty, 2006, p. 132.

⁹⁸³ Dougherty, 2006, p. 132.

Theodore Ziolkowski suggests that Prometheus as a governing image was acceptable in relation to the Marxist ideology of the German Democratic Republic and classical symbols actually provided them with ‘a test case for the historical-materialist theory of history’ showing the move from primitive classless society to the exploitation of the masses in a capitalist system.⁹⁸⁴ In what can only be described as a Marxist ‘dream vision’ Lehman writes in the final chapter of his book how he was asleep on a Soviet steamer crossing the Black Sea and dreamt that Prometheus came to him and said ‘I find myself passionately on the side of the Bolsheviks when I hear accounts of the Civil War struggles. It reminds me of my own struggles with Jove over the fire business.’⁹⁸⁵ This rather fantastical use of Prometheus was not an isolated example of Marxist use of classical symbols and figures since other Marxists used Prometheus in their work.⁹⁸⁶ The Marxist theorist Leszek Kolakowski in his 1978 study, *Main Currents of Marxism*, acknowledged Prometheus’s place in Marxist ideology:

Marx was certain that the Proletariat as the collective Prometheus would, in the universal revolution, sweep away the age-long contradiction between the interest of the individual and that of the species.⁹⁸⁷

The classicist, George Thomson, underlined the importance of the symbol of Prometheus to Marxists when he stated that Aeschylus’ Prometheus was ‘the patron saint of the proletariat.’⁹⁸⁸ For this reason the symbols of Lenin and Prometheus in ‘An Cuilithionn’ are given extra significance due to their already close relationship in modern political literature. It shows that MacLean was aware of this trend and was willing to incorporate it into his own poetic vision.

7.4 Idealism and Materialism – The Cuillin as Meeting Place for a Paradox

It is fascinating to view how a classical figure of myth like Prometheus could operate so effectively within a system of thought such as Communism, which is based so firmly on materialism. MacLean’s similar use of Prometheus leads to questions regarding the idealist-materialist debate. In the introduction to ‘An Cuilithionn’ MacLean states:

The first two parts of the poem were made by June 1939, when I

⁹⁸⁴ Ziolkowski, 2000, p. 122.

⁹⁸⁵ John Lehman, *Prometheus and the Bolsheviks* (London: Shenval Press, 1937) p. 254.

⁹⁸⁶ See Wilhem Tkaczyk’s ‘Prometheus in der Fabrik/ Prometheus in the Factory’ (1925) and Johannes R. Becher’s ‘Prometheus’ (1940). Ziolkowski, 2000, pp. 123-126.

⁹⁸⁷ Dougherty, 2006, p. 134.

⁹⁸⁸ Dougherty, 2006, p. 134.

was closest to Communism, although I never accepted the whole of Marxist philosophy, as I could never resolve the idealist-materialist argument. I regarded philosophical materialists as generally more idealistic morally than philosophical idealists.⁹⁸⁹

This admission is highly significant to the overall concerns of this chapter. I have so far been dealing with MacLean's use of historical figures and symbols and the way in which he has portrayed them in his poem. I have used the examples of Prometheus and Lenin to show that Socialists can in fact deviate from their firm materialist stance in order to highlight heroism and power in certain individuals that they deem to be beyond the everyday standard. In certain circumstances, namely the Communist writers' view of Lenin as a sort of Christ-like or Promethean figure their attitude could be described as leaning towards philosophical idealism since Lenin is held up by them as an entity or force rather than a human being. I have shown how a mythic figure such as Prometheus can be used to illustrate the process of historical materialism – Prometheus contains a story that can be interpreted in different ways and Socialists chose to highlight his connection to work and industrial advancement and to show how he rebelled against a higher authority in order to further mankind's potential.

These ideas appear to be important to MacDiarmid and MacLean – both poets show a consideration for Socialist values but they also find it easy to enter into the ideology of the 'god-builders' who exult the human spirit as an entity of its own. Perhaps MacLean and MacDiarmid's vocation as poets help them to explore questions regarding the human spirit where a strictly politically conscious person would be solely concerned with 'breid and butter problems' and the material reality of things. MacDiarmid certainly attempts to grasp the issues of socialism while still making it clear that he is searching for something more intangible besides. At the centre of this quandary can be placed his poem, 'If there are bounds to any man'. The poem calls for man to better himself and to strive for this in spite of the difficulties that may be faced. However, it is slightly less clear what MacDiarmid foresees as the fulfilment of this striving. A Communist may answer that an equal society and an elimination of class would be the fulfilment of mankind's potential but a poet may be trying to attain a more elusive goal. MacDiarmid looked on himself as both a Communist and a poet so perhaps the root of 'If there are bounds to any man' is more complex and should not be over-simplified. It is for this reason that I see this poem's inclusion in 'An Cuilithionn' as so important and in need of further consideration and also why MacLean's comments about the

⁹⁸⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 63.

issues of materialism and idealism are so significant to his wider poetic vision. It is clear from the quote that MacLean had difficulty in aligning the two opposite philosophical systems and I have already briefly outlined the main features of materialism and idealism in Chapter 2.

‘An Cuilithionn’ is often viewed as MacLean’s ode to Communism and as such it could be expected to have a philosophical materialist outlook. It is clear that MacLean is aware of the material causes in the world that are bringing about oppression. In Part VI when he describes the plight of the Gesto girl he does not generalise and instead he goes into some detail about why she is suffering such conditions of slavery – the Ship of the People came and took away the vulnerable to satisfy the capitalists’ own ends:

Fhuair mise diachainn gun fhaochadh
on latha chuireadh mi air Long nan Daoine.
Bha mi ’n Geusdo a’ buain maoraich
an uair a ghlacadh mi ’s mi ’m aonar.
Dh’ fhuiling mi daorsa nan stràc,
an dubh-chosnadh is grian le àin
a shearg m’ fheòil air mo chnàmhan⁹⁹⁰

He also shows the depth and breadth of the problem of oppression by describing the human plight through the centuries and across the world in Part VI, especially with reference to the muse of History, Clio. At no point does he attribute the oppression and cruelty to an unseen force – he is, on the contrary, very clear who the perpetrators are and why they are acting in such a way.⁹⁹¹ Individuals’ enactment of capitalism and fascism are the main reasons that he gives. However, there are subtler ways in which MacLean demonstrates an understanding and awareness of dialectical materialism. The philosophy of dialectical materialism involves movement and movement is a primary theme in ‘An Cuilithionn’ - there is the movement involved in climbing the Cuillin:

Anns an dìreadh bhon choire,
cas air sgeilpe, miar air oireig,
uchd ri ulbhaig, bial ri sgorraig,
air ceum corrach ceann gun bhoile;⁹⁹²

and the movement of water also features prominently:

Nàile, chì mise bhuan
onfhadh a’ chuain gun tràigh;

⁹⁹⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 104.

⁹⁹¹ See MacLean, 1999, pp. 110-119 for a full description and list of names.

⁹⁹² MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

chì mi bàrcadh nan stuadh
agus bàirlinn le gruaim mhóir àird:⁹⁹³

The Stallion is a symbol of the necessity of movement out of the stagnant petty-bourgeois bog⁹⁹⁴ and the sea monster in Part VII also is characterised by a movement in circles (coils) and then as a straight line towards the heavens:

Thogadh as a' mhuir an uilebheist
's chuireadh i air àird a' Chuilithinn;
bha i cearclach an ám ruagaidh
a-mach á doimhne nan cuantan,
ach a nise tha i dìreach⁹⁹⁵

It is highly significant that the movement in much of the poem is circular – I have discussed the cyclical patterns of ‘An Cuilithionn’ in Chapter 4 in which I specifically view it through the lens of Northrop Frye’s myth criticism but it seems to function on a Marxist level in relation to dialectical materialism also. Engels believes that time moves in cycles in which ‘nothing is eternal but eternally changing’ and Lenin describes dialectics as ‘the doctrine of the unity of opposites in which contradictions and change ensure the continual development of mankind.’⁹⁹⁶ MacLean’s awareness of opposites in his poetry should not be underestimated in relation to this. MacDiarmid’s preoccupation with the ‘Caledonian Antisyzygy’ may have been a factor but there is no reason why MacLean, who was well read in Marxist ideology, could not have been influenced by dialectics.

Opposites are what give MacLean’s poetry its tension and enable it to progress just as contradictions allow mankind to move forward according to Marxist theory. Opposites feature in almost every part of ‘An Cuilithionn’ – mountain/morass; good/evil; lightness/darkness; heroism/cowardice; death/rebirth; despair/hope. If this point is taken further it could be said that Lenin and Christ are opposites since Christ stands for spirituality and a belief in religion whereas Lenin is a symbol of Communism which rejects religion entirely. Yet MacLean states on 27th October, 1940 that on the Cuillin these opposites can mingle and a unity of sorts is possible – ‘You mention that in the Cuillin I have Lenin and Christ...and do not question what they would say to one another. Well, the point is that on the Cuillin nothing is absolute. Christ and Lenin are not alone, only almost random examples

⁹⁹³ MacLean, 1999, p. 116.

⁹⁹⁴ See MacLean, 1999, pp. 96-101.

⁹⁹⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

⁹⁹⁶ Dutt, 1941, p. 24 and Smith, 1972, p. 221. See my section on idealism and materialism in Chapter 2 for more detailed quotes concerning Marxist ideology. The emphasis on cyclical patterns and the spiral is striking.

of great minds moved by the great miseries of the world'.⁹⁹⁷ The mountain is the meeting place of all opposites and this is the reason why MacLean's understanding of his own identity takes place on the Cuillin. Lenin has stated 'The condition for the knowledge of all processes of the world in their 'self-movement', in their spontaneous development, in their real life, is the knowledge of them as a unity of opposites. Development is the 'struggle' of opposites'⁹⁹⁸ and there is a similarity between a Marxist political 'self-movement' and MacLean's own development as an individual. It is clear that MacLean connects Communism with the 'brain' in contrast to the soul or the heart due to his mention of Lenin in this context.⁹⁹⁹ In this way he is showing an awareness of Socialist/Communist symbolism – Lenin, who attached so much significance to the mind's interaction with its material existence, is best represented in this way.

However, it would be wrong to surmise that 'An Cuilithionn' is exclusively a poem with a philosophical materialist standpoint. Dialectical materialism states that it is about the unity of opposites - surely the greatest of opposites is actually between materialism and idealism and yet materialism denies any space for idealism at all. It is clear that MacLean's poetry has opposing elements. The sacrifice and heroism that is described so vividly in 'An Cuilithionn' is idealistic since MacLean's figures seem to possess an innate sense of heroism that is exalted to the point of them becoming more than human. The way Dimitrov is described often gives him god-like status:

Choimhead mi air a' Chuilithionn,
air an dànaig caochladh tulgaidh.
A shàr-churaidh, 's ann bha t'aodann
geàrrt' an gnùis nam mullach aosda;
bha sgal aigeannach do chridhe
toirt luasgain air Sgurr nan Gilleann.¹⁰⁰⁰

The reason MacLean is in awe of these figures is not just because they are courageous. At the root of their acts of courage there is usually an element of sacrifice and it is this that MacLean views as being of utmost importance if mankind's potential is to be realised. However, MacLean's fascination with acts of sacrifice sometimes seems to become removed

⁹⁹⁷ Acc 6419 Box 38b, NLS.

⁹⁹⁸ Smith, 1972, p 359.

⁹⁹⁹ 'Chunnaic mi 'na chaoir bheò uile/...eanchainn eagarra nam mullach,' and 'tuigse Lenin is taobh dearg Chrìosda;/...chan fhaicear ann an aon àit' iad/ ach air mullach lom nan àrd bheann.' MacLean, 1999, p. 116 and p. 90.

¹⁰⁰⁰ MacLean, 1999, p. 118.

from the specific reason why the sacrifice is made in the first place – in ‘An Cuilithionn’ the sacrifice itself becomes the main importance and is almost a detached phenomenon that takes on a universal aspect. There are perhaps religious influences at work here – Christ’s sacrifice for the world cannot necessarily be fully comprehended by the human mind. Something exists beyond the concrete and it is this that the materialists have problems accepting.

While MacLean shows a certain amount of loyalty to Communist ideology he cannot fully accept every part of its theories, hence his admission in the introduction that he could never ‘resolve the idealist-materialist argument’. His belief in human nature and the inherent ability for certain humans to strive for what is almost impossible, sacrificing themselves or a part of themselves in the process is removed from material reality and achieves something that is eternal. The materialists claim that the body or matter is the final reality and that everything can be attributed to material causes but MacLean also appears to go against this view by portraying the heart, brain and soul as separate entities that are found on the mountain.¹⁰⁰¹ In the Cuillin Praise Poem the separation is even more pronounced and seems to underline MacLean’s belief that each of these entities has qualities that make up a greater whole:

A chridhe ’n iaruin,
inntinn shìorruidh,
eanchainn riaghlaidh
thar dianas eudmhor!¹⁰⁰²

This would suggest that MacLean envisages something beyond physical matter and that genius and heroism exist as an independent force. In *Dàin do Eimhir* idealism is also present. When poems such as LVII are considered it becomes obvious that the idealist quest is something which MacLean is well aware of:

Mur gabh clach no clàr do shamhladh
dè nì ealaidh chiùil no ranntachd
mur eil seòl an tràth seo
chur an càs staimhte;¹⁰⁰³

In this instance MacLean is musing over how to encapsulate and preserve Eimhir’s beauty but the same idea is applicable to MacLean’s search for wisdom throughout eternity. He views wisdom and beauty as being independent entities. This would be unacceptable to a materialist because of its underlying idealist philosophy – in Part VII especially this idealism

¹⁰⁰¹ See MacLean, 1999, pp. 120-131 (Part VII) for detailed descriptions of the heart, brain, and spirit as embodied by the symbol of the rose and also ‘am falbhan’.

¹⁰⁰² MS 29558, NLS, pp. 99-101

¹⁰⁰³ Whyte, 2002, p. 113.

is apparent with the mention of ‘am falbhan’ just beyond the poet:

Có seo, có seo oidhche ’n anama
 a’ leantainn fiaradh an leòis fhalbhaich?
 Chan eil, chan eil ach am falbhan
 a’ sireadh a’ Chuilithinn thar fairge.¹⁰⁰⁴

‘Am falbhan’ is a reflection of MacLean’s own identity as well as a manifestation of what is possible in the future if the poet keeps striving for what is beyond him. There is no room in a strictly materialist vision for this ghostly presence and yet MacLean includes it because he views it as the thing that the whole of ‘An Cuilithionn’ has been endeavouring to achieve. It is both MacLean’s own identity and something more besides; a unification of opposites on the mountain - it is the elusive and indefinable thing that stops MacLean’s poetry from following a singular philosophy and allows it to function on a multitude of levels.

Conclusion

In this chapter I began by exploring the reasons why MacDiarmid’s poem, ‘If there are bounds to any man’ was included in Part V of ‘An Cuilithionn’. This question led me to look at MacLean’s overall vision in ‘An Cuilithionn’ in which striving for the limitless possibilities of mankind and the fulfilment of mankind’s potential featured highly. MacLean’s poem is suffused with Socialist ideology and a strong belief that Communism is the way in which mankind’s potential will be realised, mainly because Communism can provide a means with which the masses will be freed and genius can move forward and be manifested. It is interesting to note that even staunch supporters of Lenin had no trouble in mixing the religious and mythic symbols of self-sacrifice with their politics and thus parallels can be seen between them and the Irish literary-political perspectives which I have discussed in Chapter 5. The connection between politics and religion should not be underestimated and it plays an important part in many periods of history, especially when rebellion takes place against the status quo, which is one reason why it may be so evident in the symbolism of ‘An Cuilithionn’. I have shown how Prometheus and Lenin were used by MacLean and other writers as political symbols of this creativity and heroism and how sacrifice plays an important role in attaining the things that seem nearly impossible. There can be no doubt that MacLean found politics very difficult to separate from his poetry because it played an important part in his overall personal vision for mankind. However, MacLean was aware that Marxist politics did not necessarily agree with some of the other strands that can be detected

¹⁰⁰⁴ MacLean, 1999, p. 128.

in 'An Cuilithionn'.

MacLean wanted to resolve the idealist/materialist argument, mainly because, politically speaking, the two philosophies are at opposite poles and cannot exist together. 'An Cuilithionn' is the site in which he attempts to work through his political and philosophical questions and by the conclusion of the poem he has not reached a final resolution – there appears to be both a materialist (at least, a dialectical materialist) and an idealist presence. This should not be seen as a failure in the poem – on the contrary it should be viewed as a celebration of the potential of MacLean's poetic vision and its capacity to incorporate a multi-dimensional way of seeing the world around him. At the present time, when post-modernism offers the option of seeing poetry in endlessly different ways all at the same time this is not a difficult concept to grasp but for MacLean, who was used to a more structuralist way of approaching poetry it may have posed more trouble. MacLean was writing poetry during a difficult time in European history and it is understandable that the era must have affected the choices he made in the way he wrote 'An Cuilithionn'. However, there was no way that MacLean could have produced solely realist poetry of the sort that was approved by Communist Russia – he also had to move as close as he could to the journey of the soul in order for his poetry to have true power. MacLean manages to present both idealist and materialist perspectives in 'An Cuilithionn' because he is showing the whole journey towards an understanding of identity on the Cuillin. The mountain is a forum for possibility and many things can exist on the mountain at the same time, in spite of their inherent differences. In 'If there are bounds to any man' MacDiarmid sets the pace for poets who desire to reach the heights of possibility – MacLean does not complete his 'journey' in 'An Cuilithionn' but he glimpses the heights and achieves a realisation of its prospects, thus defining a part of himself in the process.

Conclusion

Principal Conclusions

There is no disjunction between the concepts of the individual and the universal in ‘An Cuilithionn’. The distinctions are broken down throughout the poem as MacLean increasingly intertwines his visions of historical and mythic figures taking place on the Cuillin. In a way, this is a logical move forward from the Romantic poets who saw nature as reflecting their own concerns and thoughts. In ‘An Cuilithionn’ the solipsistic tendencies of the Romantics give way to a more balanced way of viewing the world in which intellect and reason and the emotional symbolism of the landscape are intertwined. Throughout this thesis I have attempted to understand more fully how the heart and intellect interact in Sorley MacLean’s vision of the hero on the mountain and how MacLean steers us towards a better comprehension of the essence of self-sacrifice. There can be no doubt in my mind that, while MacLean deals with the universal concept of the hero, the initial exploration of this symbol not only has its roots in his own Gaelic tradition and landscape but is also inherent within himself, as a driving force towards self-improvement and the striving towards the fulfilment of mankind’s potential. Because political engagement has a personal dimension in ‘An Cuilithionn’, politics must be understood from an emotional as well as an intellectual perspective, and as I conducted my research on this topic, MacLean’s words to Douglas Young, in a letter dated 27th October 1940, took on a new and potent significance:

Christ and Lenin to me are only almost random examples of great minds realising emotionally as well as intellectually the “miseries that will not let them rest”.¹⁰⁰⁵

This emphasis on the emotional as well as the intellectual is what I wanted to underline in my thesis and is at the centre of my main conclusions. The message in MacLean’s poem is that emotional engagement is not just a useful part of political commitment but absolutely imperative to the continuation of mankind. In a period in which Fascism threatened even the very essence of his being, political commitment and the emotional commitment of self-sacrifice became co-dependent in MacLean’s poetry.

I began this thesis with an exploration of MacLean’s sense of identity in ‘An Cuilithionn’.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

Before this thesis, 'An Cuilithionn' was mostly viewed from a political perspective and, while I did not want to detract from the work already done in this part of the field, I wanted to highlight another important strand within the poem. To explore this I had to turn to psychology and literary theory. The two theoretical systems of psychology which I applied to 'An Cuilithionn' were Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and C.G. Jung's theory of individuation. Both theories succeed in bringing out the importance of MacLean's personal journey in the poem, albeit in different ways. While Jung's concept of individuation can help us understand the ghostly presences of the landowners in the poem as a product of MacLean's own personal fear of the encroachment of Fascism and capitalism into his life, Kristeva's abjection theory shows promise in revealing the potential meanings in MacLean's symbols of the mountain and the morass. These landscape-grounded symbols are closely connected to MacLean's own psychological responses and the way he approaches the mountain in 'An Cuilithionn' reveals his feeling of separation from the wordless connection he has with the native landscape. From the perspective of Kristeva's theory, MacLean shows that while he is capable of standing back from the 'mother' and attaining a voice of his own (in this case the 'mother' in psychological terms is the 'mother country'), it is nevertheless a major influence on his life and the feeling of connectedness with the landscape is never completely lost - his relationship with the land haunts him throughout his poetry and greatly informs the symbolism in 'An Cuilithionn'. In the case of the symbol of the morass, the abjective feelings he experiences are related to the evil which is permeating society and which he must make a stand against if his principles are to be protected and preserved.

During my research I was surprised at how well MacLean's poetry and Kristeva's theory fit together, so much so that I would claim that MacLean was a proto-Kristevan. The way in which 'An Cuilithionn' unfolds shows MacLean exhibiting a self-conscious awareness of the psychological responses of a Gaelic poet to his landscape that pre-dates Kristeva's theories by at least forty years. It is important to underline this point because it gives proof of MacLean's sophistication and insight as a poet and shows that just because Kristeva elaborated these ideas within a disciplinary framework of psychology in the 1970s, it does not mean that at least one poet was not already making the same type of inferences in his own work.

In Chapter 4 I built on my previously proposed theory that there existed a framework for a psychological journey in 'An Cuilithionn' and considered the way in which this journey was

carried out. Where in a novel it is usually the case that one or two characters tend to reveal the writer's voice or intention, in a long poem there is more opportunity for the poet's voice to come through in a variety of subtler ways. For example, a poem may have more of a pronounced narrative structure, with every image and symbol contributing to the poem's overall purpose and therefore I studied the whole shape and form of 'An Cuilithionn' in order to gain further insight into MacLean's objectives. I achieved this aim in Chapter 4 by emphasising the pattern of movement of two specific symbols, the Stallion and the sea-serpent.

After consideration of these symbols in the context of MacLean's own work as well as in the wider context of myth and world literature I concluded that at least one of the functions of these two symbols is to convey the energy which is inherent in the poem. I also suggested that it is the 'shape' of this energy which is most significant in 'An Cuilithionn' - both the Stallion and the sea-serpent appear to circle the mountain before rising upwards. I wrote in the conclusion to Chapter 4 that the energy displayed in the poem is what is needed throughout history if change is to take place and hope is to be kept alive. MacLean is evidently aware that movements such as Communism did not develop without this dynamic and I have already set out in my introduction the reasons for my theory that it is a spiral dynamic which exists in the poem. I have shown that the spiral was a familiar concept in Socialist thought and since MacLean was influenced by Socialist ideas during the composition of 'An Cuilithionn', it is possible that the spiral dynamic is a useful image to employ when studying 'An Cuilithionn'. In my thesis I have discussed mythic models such as James Frazer's cyclical myth of 'eternal return'. This was a widely understood model within Modernist literary circles and, while I think it is possible to view the same sort of structure in parts of 'An Cuilithionn' in relation to the eternal hero figure and the coiled sea-serpent around the Cuillin which is so reminiscent of the Ouroboros, MacLean's poem does not offer the same modernist view of the world as poems such as T.S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'. In MacLean's poem the myth of the eternal hero is inextricably bound up with the progressiveness of history since MacLean composed 'An Cuilithionn' with Socialist theory in his mind. This ensured that the development of human consciousness was never far from the surface of the poem and that the poem did not become caught up in a never-ending cycle of death and rebirth. Although this pattern can certainly be detected, the dramatic movement of the Stallion as he rears up on the peaks of the Cuillin and the sudden straightness of the sea-serpent striking up towards the sky cannot be ignored. It may be that these movements

represent the urgency of the Socialist need for action and change or the lyrical peaks which MacLean mentions in relation to the style of the long epic poem. It is also significant that the very nature of a spiral means that it contains points at which there is a movement upwards when the circular shape ‘becomes’ a spiral and does not return to the very beginning. I propose that when the dramatic movements of the serpent and the Stallion take place, the spiral is at the point where it is moving upwards and the upward motion of the symbols in the poem reflect the Socialist model.

Of course, it is pertinent to ask the question why a pattern of movement should be inferred in regard to the symbols in ‘An Cuilithionn’ in the first place. It is not obvious that this follows from the supposition that there is a ‘journey’ taking place within the poem. I set out to answer this question using as evidence the workings of MacLean’s own vision. The route which MacLean takes on the metaphorical Cuillin is both a personal and a political one and it is my belief that the symbols mirror this route. ‘An Cuilithionn’ is, at its heart, an idealistic poem and the upward movement of some of the key symbols in the poem, such as the Stallion and the sea-serpent, as well as the poet’s general movement from peak to peak around the Cuillin, all go some way towards showing this. I mentioned in Chapter 3 that Jung has described the psychological journey of the ego to the self as being circular and this adds weight to my theory that there is the same sort of dynamic present in the poem. Although ‘An Cuilithionn’ deals with world-wide concerns such as Fascism and capitalism, the poem never completely veers away from its function as a personal journey towards a better understanding of his own identity for MacLean. In one sense, like Milton’s *Paradise Lost*,¹⁰⁰⁶ ‘An Cuilithionn’ sets out a vision of the current state of the world for the reader and elaborates on its history as well as its future. In particular, the first parts of the poem deal with the poet’s own island, with its cultural and political history taking centre stage. However, as the poem progresses there is a growing emphasis on the more abstract notion of spiritual heroism and it is this concept which I will turn to now.

As I have set out in Chapter 5, the hero figures in the poem perform an act of self-sacrifice and the cycle of life, death and rebirth is affirmed. At this stage it could be stated that MacLean is still setting out the world as he sees it for his reader and it is true that he uses Biblical and mythic paradigms familiar in Western culture in order to do this. However, I

¹⁰⁰⁶ John Milton: *Paradise Lost*, 2nd edition, ed. by Alastair Fowler (Harlow: Longman, 1998).

believe that the function of ‘An Cuilithionn’ goes further than this - what makes the poem much more than a re-enactment of a mythic narrative is that MacLean enters completely into the poem. For instance, he does not just describe the hero’s self-sacrifice; he truly feels this sacrifice and explores the effect that this has on himself. This can be seen in Part VII when he undergoes, within his vision, the same sort of fate as Prometheus - ‘agus air ball bha cruth na biataich/ air a bòidhche ghil chianail/ agus ’s ann tholl i mo chliathaich.’.¹⁰⁰⁷ He also does this by gaining an acute sense of the individual identity in the broader sense - in other words, he looks at what makes a person truly human and goes on to explore how this human being can, by almost super-human effort, reach a higher plane of consciousness. MacLean’s imagined and historical heroes act as vehicles for him to move to a point in which he can connect most deeply with his own sense of heroism. This process of exploration provides some of the most profound insights of the poem such as the glimpse of ‘am falbhan’ at the end of Part VII¹⁰⁰⁸ and the physical and mental connection which MacLean establishes in Parts I and II.¹⁰⁰⁹

‘An Cuilithionn’ deals with the major question of what constitutes heroism in MacLean’s worldview. For MacLean the balance between emotion and intellect is of major importance in relation to his political views and this is connected to the theme of heroic self-sacrifice. In MacLean’s view, in order to be prepared to sacrifice oneself for a cause there must be an emotional connection with one’s political beliefs. However, it is the notion of striving, which can be traced right through the poem, which is of the greatest importance. In ‘An Cuilithionn’ heroism can be interpreted slightly differently from the usual definitions of bravery and courage. The striving for something greater than oneself or beyond one’s imagining is integral to MacLean’s work as well as the poetry of MacDiarmid and its roots may lie in the political and literary movements which profoundly influenced Scottish literature. The Scottish Literary Renaissance with its connections to Scottish Nationalism as well as its ideas such as ‘Celtic Communism’¹⁰¹⁰ is relevant here since this movement was made up of writers who were fully aware of the importance of their work to politics as well as culture.¹⁰¹¹ As I

¹⁰⁰⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

¹⁰⁰⁸ MacLean, 1999, pp. 129-130.

¹⁰⁰⁹ In particular see MacLean, 1999, p. 64 and pp. 76-78.

¹⁰¹⁰ W.F. Skene’s (1809-92) *Celtic Scotland* (1880) puts forward a vision of a golden age of Celtic agrarian society which laid the foundations for the 20th century concept of Celtic Communism. Celtic revivalists in early 20th century Scotland and Ireland were exploring the idea that the clan system formed a ‘socialist utopia’. This idealised view of Celtic society is explored by Pittock, 1999, 75-77.

¹⁰¹¹ See Chapter 6 for a more detailed discussion of the Scottish Literary Renaissance and politics.

discussed in Chapter 6, heroic striving is as much about achieving a sense of identity as it is about accomplishing courageous feats. In fact, for poets such as MacDiarmid and MacLean this sense of striving was paramount to the continuation of mankind's potential, whether that was their own personal potential as poets, or the potential of their country and the wider world. From the research which I have undertaken on 'An Cuilithionn' I have formed a strong conviction that 'am falbhan', a symbol which is of central importance in Part VII of the poem and is at the heart of the poem's main finale, is a manifestation of the sense of striving which is alluded to throughout 'An Cuilithionn's' seven parts. This symbol is a culmination of all of the visions which MacLean has previously witnessed in relation to the heroic striving of individuals throughout history and, as I have already set out in my introduction in relation to the morass, MacLean's symbols are multi-faceted and are capable of operating within many contexts.

In a political context 'am falbhan' symbolises the hope and the expectancy which Communism holds for the poet. Marx and Engels's claim at the beginning of *The Communist Manifesto* that 'A spectre is haunting Europe, the spectre of Communism'¹⁰¹² cannot have failed to have an effect on MacLean. MacLean's call in 'An Cuilithionn' was for a new Socialist order to break down the existing capitalist system and bring justice for the oppressed people of the world. It may be that there are shades of the Communist spectre in the ghost-like journeying soul which he describes as 'ag iargain a' Chuilithinn 's e 'g éirigh.'¹⁰¹³ Of course, it is also completely possible to see 'am falbhan' as a manifestation of MacLean's own spirit. From a psychological standpoint, the dream-like atmosphere of these stanzas suggests that this could be some part of the poet's unconscious self which is haunting him - its presence is felt profoundly but can never be completely grasped just as Freud and Jung would argue that the unconscious can only be partly accessed through symbols and dreams.¹⁰¹⁴ This explanation would certainly explain the longing for the unattainable which is apparent in these stanzas - 'Chan eil ach an nì do-ruighinn'.¹⁰¹⁵ Also, if I am correct in my theory that 'An Cuilithionn' is MacLean's personal exploration of his own identity, it would

¹⁰¹² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, intro. and notes. by Gareth Stedman Jones (London: Penguin Books, 2002) p. 218.

¹⁰¹³ MacLean, 1999, p. 130.

¹⁰¹⁴ See my section on psychoanalysis in Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of Jungian and Freudian theory.

¹⁰¹⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 128.

be reasonable to suggest that the prominent position of ‘am falbhan’ at the end of the poem is positioned to show to maximum effect how the poet feels about himself and his own ‘journey’ on the metaphorical Cuillin. However, I also sense a more spiritual aspect to ‘am falbhan’, and would propose that the spectre of the Cuillin is essentially a spiritual entity of MacLean’s own imagining. His poetry is filled with references to the eternal. When he writes ‘Ceumannan spioraid ri mo thaobh/ agus ceumannan ciùin mo ghaoil’¹⁰¹⁶ one is reminded of Eimhir and the theme of the eternal which is employed in poems such as ‘Coin is Madaidhean-allaidh’ (XXIX) and ‘Na Samhlaidhean’ (XXVIII).¹⁰¹⁷ In XXIX the dogs and wolves are chasing MacLean’s unwritten poems across the wilderness of eternity and it is perhaps not unreasonable to view the endless footsteps of ‘am falbhan’ throughout time as another aspect of MacLean’s view of the eternal poetic yearning for hope and inspiration - descriptions such as ‘Chan eil ach tannasg lom cridhe’¹⁰¹⁸ and ‘an samhla a chunnaic an t-anam’¹⁰¹⁹ allude to this spiritual yearning. In XXVIII MacLean describes the cry of his poems and this reference to wandering on the mountains is also reminiscent of ‘am falbhan’:

’S ann, a ghaoil, bho na taobhan
fad às, cianail a bhios an glaothaich,
ag iargain, ag èigheach air do ghaol-sa.
Gabhaidh iad mullaichean nan àrd-bheann
ghinealach...¹⁰²⁰

I have suggested some of the possibilities regarding the last stanzas of the poem and it is fitting that a symbol such as ‘am falbhan’ cannot be attached to one specific context since the overall vision in ‘An Cuilithionn’ is greater than the sum of its parts. While ‘am falbhan’ may manifest MacLean’s political hopes for a better future for mankind, it cannot ever be a completely Communist symbol since the themes of eternity and the spirit also permeate the symbol and thus allows ‘am falbhan’ to be viewed from idealist perspective also. Therefore, ‘am falbhan’ in Part VII of the poem confirms on a smaller scale what the rest of the poem also shows; that there are major opposites at work in ‘An Cuilithionn’ - MacLean himself admits that in relation to the poem he ‘could never resolve the idealist-materialist

¹⁰¹⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 128.

¹⁰¹⁷ Whyte, 2002, pp. 83, 85.

¹⁰¹⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 128.

¹⁰¹⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 128.

¹⁰²⁰ Whyte, 2002, p. 83.

argument'.¹⁰²¹ And yet, I can conclude that rather than becoming the poem's weakness, this actually shows the strength of the poet's vision and the originality of his metaphysics.

The opposite theories of idealism and materialism continue to be of significance with the repeated mention in 'An Cuilithionn' of a tripartite self - mind, body and spirit. This is relevant to MacLean's effort at grasping a sense of his own identity within the poem and is actually the key to the metaphysical system which MacLean seems to follow. In Chapter 6 I proposed that the heart, brain and spirit all have a place within 'An Cuilithionn' and that while MacLean's mention of physical suffering could be seen from a materialist viewpoint, the spiritual dimension of eternal suffering and self-sacrifice suggests that MacLean also held idealist views in relation to his poetry which cannot be ignored. Thus, the reality of MacLean's vision may be more complex than it first appears. However, despite the fact that his repeated mention of self-sacrifice takes on importance detached from the personal circumstances of each hero and despite him referring to the brain, heart and spirit separately, he never suggests that one is more important than the other as is often the case when philosophers such as Descartes attempt to pinpoint what is the make-up of the self.¹⁰²² Lenin's brain is admired just as much as Christ's heart and both entities are seen as important in the striving for the fulfilment of mankind's potential. In actual fact, due to MacLean's continued use of the imagery of heroic self-sacrifice right up to the end of the poem it is likely that there is also a place for the Judeo-Christian tradition within his metaphysical system. This system declares that while the spirit can separate from the body, the physical resurrection of the body is nevertheless of major importance because it is a vital part of the self - in other words, the human spirit exists within a body. MacLean puts too much emphasis on self-sacrifice coupled with an acute sense of physical suffering and exertion for the body not to have importance. MacLean's tendency to describe Christ as a heart or Lenin as a brain or great mind was an attempt to grasp the separate aspects of what made his heroes what they are. He struggles to come to terms with intellect and love in *Dàin do Eimhir* too but this does not mean he does not foresee a meeting of these things - the whole of 'A Chiall 's a Ghràidh' is dedicated to this subject and in 'An Cuilithionn' he views the mountain-top as the place where supposed contradictions and oppositions can meet - 'chan fhaicear ann an aon àit' iad/ ach air mullach lom nan àrd bheann.'¹⁰²³ This is reminiscent of the ideas which MacDiarmid

¹⁰²¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 63.

¹⁰²² Chapter 2 of this thesis provides a more thorough analysis of the philosophical problems in defining self.

¹⁰²³ MacLean, 1999, pp. 4-7.

was putting forward in *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* when he wrote ‘I’ll ha’e nae hauf-way hoose, but aye be whaur/ Extremes meet’.¹⁰²⁴ The Christian emphasis in MacLean’s theme of soul with body does not detract from MacLean’s Communist ideals since the Socialists placed importance on the body, albeit in the form of materialism, which I explored in Chapter 6.

Throughout this thesis I have made continual reference to two important influences on MacLean; Christianity and Communism.¹⁰²⁵ These influences have affected his poem in both obvious and subtle ways and their importance to the overall achievement of ‘An Cuilithionn’ cannot be denied. Both Christianity and Communism offer salvation of a sort for mankind and while they may appear to be complete opposites they are, on certain levels, very alike, especially for a poet such as MacLean who was able to look behind the overt ideology. Christianity and Communism possess the same underlying assumption of a pattern of birth, death and rebirth. Christians believe in a spiritual salvation due to Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection and Communists believe in the regeneration and rebirth of mankind on this earth after the old order gives way and is toppled by a new one. Although Christianity works on an individual level while Communism deals with more abstract concepts of society and mankind, in both cases mankind achieves salvation and the cycle of birth, death and rebirth becomes a spiral, because once change occurs the pattern alters and a higher level of consciousness is reached. It is difficult to assess whether MacLean was entirely aware of the similarities with the narrative structures of both belief systems or ideologies. He does not mention anything of this in his letters or notebooks and may not have felt comfortable in doing so considering his stand as a self-confessed Communist. The Communists presented Communism as something completely original and independent of other ideology and their aversion to religion may not be simply because of their concerns about its negative effect on mankind; it may also be because the similarities with their own ideology were a little too close for comfort.

I think that MacLean must have been conscious of the similarities between Christianity and Communism at least on certain levels if ‘An Cuilithionn’ is anything to go by. The poem

¹⁰²⁴ Riach and Grieve, 1994, p. 30.

¹⁰²⁵ I am using Christianity in the broad sense in this instance - MacLean’s personal background is Free Presbyterian but in comparing Christianity and Communism I am looking behind the specific denominations in order to view the narrative structures and themes.

casts both Christ and Socialist figures such as Dimitrov, Liebknecht and James Connolly as heroes and MacLean makes no apology for casting such figures side by side. It is highly likely that he is focussing on Christ and the Socialist figures as political-revolutionary figures whose intention was to alter the world for the benefit of mankind. He discusses this in the letter to Douglas Young which I have already quoted at the beginning of my Conclusion - 'Christ and Lenin to me are only almost random examples of great minds realising emotionally as well as intellectually the "miseries that will not let them rest".'¹⁰²⁶ In this letter MacLean seems to be refuting any claims that Christ is anything to him but a heroic figure on the same lines as his Socialist heroes. This may be so, and it is perfectly acceptable that he can admire both types of 'hero'. After all, within the Gaelic tradition there are strands of both a strong and deep-seated religious ideology as well as the ideals and beliefs connected to the Land Agitation. While both strands did not always sit well with each other many people managed to align them in their own minds and MacLean's family traditions brought him into contact with stories of both. However, on another level, MacLean's inclusion of Christ in his heroic roll-call should not be discounted as simply another heroic figure. While he was disillusioned with religion there are too many suggestions of a spiritual aspect to self-sacrifice in 'An Cuilithionn' to sideline the Christ-like hero.

This point leads me onto my conclusions regarding politics and spirituality in the poem. 'An Cuilithionn' is life-affirming in two ways. Firstly, from a Socialist perspective MacLean is confirming the importance of individual life and the need for justice so that mankind as a whole can exist and thrive. Secondly, in a spiritual sense, with the promise of regeneration and the hope of heroic acts of self-sacrifice bringing forth a resurrection, life is affirmed in a personal way for MacLean and is symbolised by the rising force of the Stallion. MacLean's personal rebirth happens at the end of the poem when he glimpses 'am falbhan' on the mountain and experiences fleetingly a vision of hope and an understanding that there exists within the difficulties and injustices of the world, a form of heroism which cannot be destroyed. This heroism exists throughout the ages, constantly being renewed, and is manifested in certain people if they strive hard enough to attain it.

MacLean's hero figure is undoubtedly an individual but the chorus of 'voices' and the long roll-call of heroes throughout history also show that the individual hero is part of a larger

¹⁰²⁶ Acc 6419, Box 38b, NLS.

picture. In the poem, the Cuillin and the Skye landscape in general could be described as a miniature of the world itself - all the same values such as self-sacrifice and heroism, which can be found in MacLean's vision of Europe and the rest of the world, are also present in the local landscape (as are the negative values displayed in the morass and the greed of the capitalist system throughout Europe). It is this feature of the poem which allows the local and the universal to exist side by side and for MacLean to gain a fuller understanding of human nature. I may have underlined the importance of MacLean's establishment of his identity at the beginning of this thesis but the emphasis on the universal sacrificial hero also shows that MacLean understands that in order to truly comprehend life, death must also be embraced; and it is fair to state that death and suffering are never far from the surface of 'An Cuilithionn', whether from a local perspective of the Highlands with its history of injustice and bloodshed or against the backdrop of the threat of Fascism in the broader setting of Europe. In Part VI the Gesto girl is completely uprooted from her family, land and culture and is spiritually and mentally 'lost' in a foreign land.¹⁰²⁷ While this is not actually happening to MacLean himself his depth of understanding of this situation or any of the injustices suffered by his people should not be ignored. In Part VII he appears to undergo the same sacrifice as Prometheus when he describes his vision of how his love becomes a vulture on the Cuillin - 'agus 's ann tholl i mo chliathaich'.¹⁰²⁸ As the poem progresses more voices are heard on the mountain such as Clio, but I do not think that this means that MacLean is any the less present in the poem at this stage. On the contrary, Clio takes a similar stance to MacLean's own and emphasises the convictions and ideas which are relevant to the poet. The last section in Part VII with 'am falbhan' also proves exactly how much of MacLean's own personal experience is invested in 'An Cuilithionn'. I am aware that apart from the example with the vultures on the Cuillin which I have cited above, MacLean appears to only be watching the sacrificial hero from his standpoint on the mountain and if this is true it is fair to ask the question of whether the poem can be said to be based on MacLean's own journey towards an understanding of himself in that case. I would rebut this question by pointing out that Christians who wish to be one with Christ do not go through the same sacrifice that he did and yet they acknowledge his sacrifice and may experience a spiritual epiphany which may be akin to a loss of self when they truly understand the meaning of this sacrifice. In other words, to use another psychological term to illustrate my point, the ego becomes less

¹⁰²⁷ MacLean, 1999, p. 104-108.

¹⁰²⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 122.

important when a person connects with something on a transcendent level. I believe that it was this transcendent level which MacLean was achieving in 'An Cuilithionn'.

Because of the conclusions which I have already drawn above, I believe that MacLean had a strong sense of spirituality in the poem and that this spiritual striving is closely connected to the heroes which he envisions on the Cuillin. The fact that these heroes are very often political heroes is no accident and it is for this reason that I think it is impossible to extract MacLean's politics from his spirituality - for MacLean true heroism must not only be politically aware but also must function on a higher level which is directly linked to a sense of identity and how this identity has the potential to be sacrificed for the greater good. 'An Cuilithionn' is an affirmation from both a universal and individual perspective of humanity and its ability to regenerate. He shows knowledge of this in 'An Cuilithionn' but as a poet he knows that knowledge is not enough. The essence of this striving must also be grasped and only then can wisdom be attained. Wisdom and knowledge are two different things as Neil Gunn in his novel, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep*, is keen to show. At the end of the novel the dangers of knowledge without wisdom is discussed in relation to Fascism:

There was a time when the Questioner had wisdom. He used his head and drew on his wisdom. But the more he used his head only, the paler his wisdom became, until at last the elements of wisdom were no longer so but only the ghostly bits he used for making a pattern with his head. He knew in his head that you suffered, but as the head itself does not suffer he himself was not affected...He has divorced knowledge from wisdom, the head from the heart, the intellect from the spirit - for man has many words for these two regions - and because of the divorce, the taste of life has gone bitter and its hope sterile.¹⁰²⁹

'An Cuilithionn' is an appeal for the use of both heart and mind in order for them to meet together and MacLean's difficulty with the idealist-materialist argument is proof of his understanding of the complexities of this matter. MacLean understands, like Gunn, that politics are nothing without the potent effect of true feeling to aid in the struggle. In Gunn's novel *Old Hector* realises that wisdom is what haunts man and gives life its potency. He is told by the Host that 'poems, too, can be made in the head out of a pattern of words. But they are not true poems. They have no eternal life in them and so they never become a legend. Art dies.'¹⁰³⁰ I believe that it is this elusive wisdom which haunts MacLean throughout his poetry

¹⁰²⁹ Neil M. Gunn, *The Green Isle of the Great Deep* (London: Souvenir Press, 1975) p. 242. This book was first published in 1944 and is an example of literary reactions to Fascism.

¹⁰³⁰ Gunn, 1975, p. 243.

and which makes 'An Cuilithionn' not simply a political poem but a poem which holds a true understanding of humanity and what mankind is capable of. It is this striving which gives the poem its hope at the end of Part VII, for while MacLean knows he may never fully grasp the complete essence of what he is striving for he knows it exists and that is, in itself, enough. In taking this step forward in his poem MacLean also journeys further forward in understanding himself as a small part of the vast multitude of mankind.

Contributions to the Field

During my research I have employed psychoanalysis and literary theory in order to understand more fully the different levels of meaning in 'An Cuilithionn' and this new way of approaching MacLean's work has allowed his personal poetic issues and ideals to exist in the same space as his political concerns, thus showing how these different aspects interact. It is hoped that the interdisciplinary approach used in this thesis will encourage further study of works by MacLean and other Gaelic poets in order for new understanding of themes which are often uniquely Gaelic to be brought to the forefront of literary studies. It is hoped that this thesis has provided a model for this and that Gaelic poetry's place in the wider literary sphere may be strengthened when modern Gaelic poetry is assessed with the same degree of seriousness as e.g. English literature, allowing comparisons to be drawn between the different fields. In this way, Gaelic poetry will remain distinctive while also showing continuity with more general historical, political and cultural trends. It is also hoped that this thesis will add to the work which has already been carried out in showing Sorley MacLean's worth as a European poet as well as a Scottish one.

Further Research

Throughout this research I have endeavoured to show the importance of 'An Cuilithionn' as both a valuable text on its own as well as an intrinsic part of the greater body of MacLean's poetry. This thesis discusses 'An Cuilithionn' in detail but there are other poems by MacLean which make mention of the mountain and further research into this symbol in MacLean and other poets' work may release more meanings relating to this multi-faceted symbol. It is my hope that I may be able to assert whether MacLean's mountain symbol, and indeed, his symbol of the morass, evolves through time in his other poems or whether the meanings of his symbols remain unchanged. I also examine two animals - the stallion and the sea-serpent - throughout the course of my thesis. This is an area of research which could be elaborated on,

especially in relation to MacLean's 'Coilltean Ratharsair', which is rich in snake symbolism. Research has already been conducted on MacLean's use of landscape imagery but there has been less work carried out on the fauna which exists in MacLean's poetry. In particular, the poetic treatment of the deer in certain poems by MacLean may reveal more information regarding his traditional Gaelic influences and their function in modern poetry. I have not had the space in this thesis to compare MacLean's 'An Cuilithionn' with other modern poetry from later in the twentieth century. For example, I think it would be a highly useful and interesting exercise if 'An Cuilithionn' was to be compared and contrasted with Pablo Neruda's *Canto General*,¹⁰³¹ which also includes mountain symbolism and which looks at the hardships and injustices of mankind, albeit from a South American perspective.¹⁰³² These types of studies may add further to the understanding and appreciation of MacLean as a poet of universal stature.

Apart from brief references in relation to specific points, I have not had the opportunity in the thesis to link 'An Cuilithionn' to the greater body of Gaelic literature from before the twentieth century. 'An Cuilithionn' was dedicated to both Hugh MacDiarmid and Alastair Mac Mhaighstir Alastair.¹⁰³³ It is perhaps fitting that, according to Ronald Black, Mac Mhaighstir Alastair was the first Gaelic poet to create an epic¹⁰³⁴ - 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill'¹⁰³⁵ - which would have been particularly fresh in MacLean's mind at the time of composing 'An Cuilithionn' since he had assisted in MacDiarmid's translation of the poem in 1935.¹⁰³⁶ 'Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill' evokes the great voyages of the early Irish tradition and the important part played by the heroic crew. It could be described as a Jacobite poem and is a metaphor for the clan. In 'Birlinn' there is more emphasis on the heroic crew than the chief and Ronald Black suggests that the poem's stress on the dignity of labour is perhaps the

¹⁰³¹ Pablo Neruda, *Canto General*, fiftieth anniversary edition, trans. by Jack Schmitt (London: University of California Press, 2000)

¹⁰³² I am currently researching this topic with a view to writing an article on the subject.

¹⁰³³ MacLean, 1999, p. 64.

¹⁰³⁴ Black, 2001, p. 470.

¹⁰³⁵ *Alasdair Mac Mhaighstir Alasdair: Selected Poems*. ed. by Derick S. Thomson (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, 1996) pp. 132-65.

¹⁰³⁶ See Alexander MacDonald, *The Birlinn of Clanranald (Birlinn Chlann Raghnaill)* trans. by Hugh MacDiarmid (St Andrews: Abbey Book Shop/ Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 1935).

reason why MacDiarmid was drawn to translating it.¹⁰³⁷ Black also points out that the *Birlinn* sets sail on St Brigid's Day and that the spring quarter day is a 'celebration of the renewal of fertility through the people's labour in ploughing, sowing, harrowing and manuring the ground, so by this argument the poem speaks to us of a new social contract for the people.'¹⁰³⁸ This ideal can also be applied to 'An Cuilithionn', which is, like 'Birlinn', an epic poem. The Cuillin is a symbol of the struggle and heroism of the people and by the end of the poem hope for the dawn of a new age for mankind is glimpsed. It would be a useful study to compare these two poems and to highlight the possible political similarities of them from a Socialist viewpoint, thus setting 'An Cuilithionn' within a wider Gaelic socio-political context. New ideas and observations may emerge when MacLean's work is subjected to a close reading specifically in relation to other Gaelic poems.

Other parts of 'An Cuilithionn' are also worthy of more research than I have afforded them in this thesis. For a variety of reasons many sections and specific lines in the manuscript were excised before the final version was published. It would nevertheless be interesting to view specific sections and discuss the possibility that MacLean left out sections later on because they put too much emphasis on the personal aspects of his life and his frustrations with certain sections of society. If this could be proved in some way, it would add credence to the argument that 'An Cuilithionn' is more than just a political poem in the context of a specific time in the poet's life and is, in fact, far more philosophical and universal in its scope. The main section to be removed before publication is the Cuillin praise poem, which is quite a different sort of section from the other excised lines. These stanzas should definitely be studied in more depth in order to reveal more of MacLean's Gaelic background and influences and the effect that this had on his poetic style.¹⁰³⁹

On the subject of style and Gaelic influences I think it would also be useful to survey the form and structure of each part of 'An Cuilithionn'. It became apparent to me as my research on the poem progressed, that Parts I and II seem to somehow stand alone from the rest of the poem due to the rich Gaelic history and culture that unfolds in these opening sections. This is to be expected if MacLean is beginning with the personal and moving outwards to survey the

¹⁰³⁷ Black, 2001, p. 472.

¹⁰³⁸ Black, 2001, p. 473.

¹⁰³⁹ I hope to explore this subject in due course as an extended article.

rest of the world but it does raise questions regarding the way the composition of ‘An Cuilithionn’ unfolded and gives an insight into the poet’s craft. I am unsure whether it would be possible to trace a ‘psychic’ timeline in relation to the different parts of the poem and it is quite likely that the parts of ‘An Cuilithionn’ were published in the order that they were written, but it would be interesting to see if his priorities regarding the main themes of the poem were in place from the outset or if they evolved as the poem itself evolved. I think it would be possible to answer some of these questions by studying the poem and also MacLean’s personal correspondence dating from around this time.

A study of the structure of ‘An Cuilithionn’ should also be undertaken from a technical perspective. Douglas Young uses a musical analogy to try to understand the poem, describing it as an overture with MacLean’s unwritten poems as the opera to this overture.¹⁰⁴⁰ I mention briefly in my thesis, with particular emphasis on Part VI, the way in which MacLean uses traditional forms of Gaelic rhyme and poetic form. However, the subject of MacLean’s musicality requires far more than a brief mention and further study will better furnish our understanding of the impact which the Gaelic tradition had on MacLean’s poetry.¹⁰⁴¹

In my thesis I discuss the theories of Jung and Kristeva in relation to MacLean. However, while these theories are important to my research, they do not take precedence. I realise that the full-scale studies of MacLean’s work are still in relative infancy and perhaps when more scholarship has established the principal aspects of MacLean’s poetry in more detail it may be time for more advanced studies of his work from specific theoretical perspectives. A feminist study of the poetry would be sure to reveal new ideas about *Dàin do Eimhir* and other poems since there is no shortage of female figures in MacLean’s work. A Lacanian perspective may further our understanding of MacLean’s use of language. MacLean writes that after he wrote his poem ‘The Heron’, he ‘thought it better than any of my English stuff, and because of that - but also for patriotic reasons - I stopped writing verse in English and destroyed all the English stuff I could lay my hands on.’¹⁰⁴² This is a clear and definite statement of intent and MacLean’s decision to write in Gaelic is almost certainly the reason

¹⁰⁴⁰ MS 29561, NLS.

¹⁰⁴¹ In ‘My Relationship with the Muse’ MacLean describes himself as a ‘traditional Gaelic singer manqué’ and this can be directly related to the musicality of his poetry. See MacLean, 1985, pp. 6-14 (p. 6).

¹⁰⁴² MacLean, 1999, p. xiv.

why less work has been carried out on such an important poet as MacLean and yet, no full-scale study has been undertaken on the psychology of the usage of Gaelic by the poet and the effect that this choice has had on the type of poetry which he has produced. Perhaps in the future, if research of this sort is embarked on, the synthesis of a Gaelic poet with the full knowledge of his own tradition and an equally rich comprehension of the wider European tradition will be better understood.

It is worth noting at this point that my thesis has been based on literary studies and literary theory and, while I have implied that there is a possible metaphysical system which is concealed in the poem which may be partly conceived from a system based on MacLean's own ideas, specific philosophical matters go beyond the scope of this thesis. It may be the case that these sorts of questions will provide a starting-point for a more philosophy-orientated form of research into MacLean's poetry.

The letters which I have cited in this thesis, particularly the MacLean-Young letters are also worthy of further study in their own right. They offer a fascinating insight into the mind of the poet as well as other writers of the period and they also provide a personal view of the political and literary climate of Scotland in the 1930s and 1940s. Many of my conclusions in this thesis could not have been drawn without these letters and they offer much more detailed information on MacLean's political standpoint and views than many of his poems and essays. For this reason it is my hope that I will conduct more research on these letters in the future. They would present a challenging and rewarding study in the form of post-doctoral research.

While I have suggested that there is still a vast amount of work which should be undertaken if MacLean's poetry is to be better understood, this thesis nevertheless offers new ways of approaching his work. In certain ways this thesis is innovative in its multi-disciplinary approach but a poet of such stature warrants such treatment. There can be no doubt that MacLean has a place among important Gaelic and Scottish poets but he also has major significance within a European context and when the many different aspects of his poetry are acknowledged the study of this poet can never fail to be an enlightening and inspiring experience.

Appendix I

A Proposed Introduction for ‘An Cuilithionn’

The following essay by Douglas Young was intended as an introduction to a proposed English translation of ‘An Cuilithionn’, which MacLean and Young had discussed as a possibility in the future. It provides one example of how the literati of MacLean’s own time viewed his work.

MS 29561 (1943) National Library of Scotland, Douglas Young’s Introduction to an English Translation of ‘An Cuilithionn’

To introduce “The Coolin”

You will find here 1628 lines of Gaelic poetry, composed by Sorley MacLean, a thirty year old Communist soldier from the island of Raasay off the north-west coast of Scotland.

They form in sum a work difficult to describe and impossible to classify, but of high poetic value and even of historical significance. If you can cope with the Gaelic and with the other languages in question you will perhaps agree that this production of Sorley’s is comparable with the earlier revelations of other first-rate poets writing at the beginning of a new phase in their national language, comparable with “The Suppliants” and “The Persians” of Aeschylus, with the “Vita Nuova” of Dante, with Pushkin’s “Ruslan and Lyudmila”.

This composition is named after the Coolin range of mountains in the island of Skye, seen from Sorley’s home in Raasay, and the variety of that range is represented in the bewildering variety of matters and styles in this poem: vividly stimulating presentations of the sensations of mountaineering, tirades of impassioned satire, flights of jocular fantasy, brilliant ‘tours de force’ of parody, tracts of picturesque narrative, dramatic scenes of heart-moving poignancy, lyrics of marvellous complexity and power in melody and rhythm, and, to end all, in the Seventh Movement a culmination of passionate prophetic mystical intensity.

Sorley's philosopher friend George Davie describes it dry-as-dustily as "a long opinionative rant, interspersed with lyrics". Christopher Grieve, to whom it is dedicated, (jointly with the eighteenth-century patriot-poet Alexander MacDonald), writes of it as "a great anti-imperialist and Marxist poem", which "sees the wild peaks of the Cuillin in terms of the endless struggles of mankind and is not only a magnificent evocation of the Hebridean landscape but of the whole tumult of history and human hope, for the past sees not only the superficialities of the scene, and not only the local history of which these Skye hills have been the theatre, but the entire perspective of human history, of which they provide such a tortured and towering symbol."

For myself it is not like a piece of literature, as we have become used to literature. Aristotle and Boileau would be all at sea in it. It has something of MacDiarmid's gallimaufreys "The Drunk Man looks at the Thistle" and "To Circumjack Cencrastus", something also of the long Gaelic rants of William Livingstone of Islay. But it does not fit in truly to any literary class.

A musical analogy may be more enlightening. It is not like a symphony, for it has not the ordered structure of a symphony. It is more like an overture, in which the leading themes of the opera are succinctly displayed. If so, to carry on the analogy, the opera to this overture will have to be all Sorley's unwritten poems. The already published *Dain do Eimhir*, a series of love poems, elaborate a motive of which *The Coolin* here offers only the most faintly allusive echoes. You will have a better idea of what to expect if we compare this composition to that modern orchestral form the Tone-Poem, such as Richard Strauss's "Till Eogenspiegel" or Sibelius' "Finlandia". A theme may be announced and at once left, then taken up later and elaborated, and still later presented again interplaying with some other theme, and finally brought back to memory now and then by some brief allusion.

Comparison with visual media may also be helpful. In parts this work is like a tapestry, or like that famous Turkish hunting-carpet in the Vienna Museum fuer Kunst und Gewerbe, where representational elements of individual naturalistic interest are subsumed into a formal pattern which achieves an astounding synthesis of intricacy and simplicity. But, if this analogy be pressed, Sorley's Seventh Movement shows the poem turning into a magical flying carpet which conveys us into a mythistorical empyrean inhabited by such 'prima facie' unlikely company as Lucretius, Beethoven, Liebknicht, Toussaint l'Ouverture, Spartacus, Jesus Christ, Dimitrov, Mao Tse Tung, Shelley, Young Pàdraig MacCrimmon the bag-piper,

Mary MacPherson the poetess of the crofters' rising, Connolly the Irish Socialist revolutionary, and other symbolic personalities taken from all space and all time.

For those who cannot yet cope with the Gaelic I have attempted to convey some idea of the work in a medium intelligible, with a little initial goodwill, to those acquainted with English. I have not tried to translate it into English poetry, that is a job for one who is both English and a poet. I have merely projected it into English vocables, arranged mainly according to assonance and sprung rhythm. A translation would have to be done according to the genius of English poetry. My projection seeks to transmit the meaning and something of the flavour of the Gaelic original while decanting it into English words. I have used many phrases that follow the Gaelic idiom (Gaelisms, Celticisms, Galatisms if you like). I have usually sought vowel-asonance, rather than full rime, in imitation of the Gaelic vocalic system, and to give myself a wider range in the choice of words. Till Chaucer English poets commonly used consonantal assonance (alliteration), and some untutored versifiers have always tended to vowel-asonance, a tendency lately developed by sophisticated poets, notably the later Yeats. But there is this difficulty: Gaelic speakers emphasise their stressed vowels far more than English-speakers do, as anyone knows who has heard a Gaelic speaker speaking English, and English has a much higher proportion of dull obscure stressed syllables than most languages, as singers are sadly aware. However, with initial goodwill, the reader may find the ear becoming attuned to my assonantal efforts and will probably after a time get something of the vocalic effect of the original. I have done a few passages into English-style rime for variety and contrast. The English pronunciation I had in mind is Sorley's own, Inverness English, *lingua inglesa in bocca scozzo-celtica*, a dialect as well reputed, I believe, as that of Simla or the pre-1914 Curragh.

By the way of a rhythmic system Sorley has many passages in a loose conversational "sprung rhythm", which will seem to many Gaelic readers as no kind of verse at all. But how are we to scan such lines of Shakespeare as "After life's fitful fever he sleeps well"? Since Hopkins, Bridges and their successors sprung rhythm ought by now to be familiar enough to readers of English; even if not so, they will probably find my modest projection easy enough to read, for it aims only at a conversational speech-order and stress-system. Incidentally, it is nearly as literal as the celebrated Kelly's keys of Vergil, and, supplemented by my notes and the dictionary of Dwelly or that of Maclennan, may serve as a basis of operations to any Communist or Mousophile who takes a fancy to project *The Coolin* into his own language, be

it Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Hebrew, or Uzbek.

I have furnished an index of personal names¹⁰⁴³ from which it can be seen at a glance how great is the range of politics and culture in which Sorley makes himself at home, a wider range than any Scots Gaelic poet for two centuries.

Further, you may find useful the index of place-names. The Gaelic ones are set out in an English spelling intended to be immediately intelligible to all English readers, and I must beg those who know and love the Skye hills by their proper names to forgive my monstrosities on the score of their unpretentious utility.

Book form cannot present *The Coolin* adequately. Something might be done in the way of a talking picture, given a sympathetic Scots musician and a sympathetic Scots expert in cinematic photography. Meantime we must all be obliged to William Maclennan and William Crosbie for their superb production of this volume.

¹⁰⁴³ I have found no record of this index in the National Library but I have included my own index of names in Appendix III to help add to the understanding of local history in Part I of 'An Cuilithionn'.

Appendix II

The Cuillin Praise Poem

In the manuscript version of Part VII of ‘An Cuilithionn’, which can be found in the National Library of Scotland, there are various lines and complete passages that have been excised before the poem was published. However, none are as complete and well-formed as the section which I have included in its entirety below. This ‘praise poem’ is part of the final section of ‘An Cuilithionn’ and can be located in the manuscript before the final ‘Có seo, có seo’ stanzas. I have placed Sorley MacLean’s own English translations next to the Gaelic verse. In certain cases the English translation deviates slightly in meaning from the Gaelic original - in instances such as these MacLean may have been attempting to achieve a ‘poetic’ translation with more attention to rhythm. A variant of this lyric’s metre (verses ending on a monosyllabic rhyme rather than disyllabic) already feature twice in the published version of ‘An Cuilithionn’, in Part V and Part VI.¹⁰⁴⁴ It is almost impossible to translate Gaelic of this sort into English in poetic form without losing some of its essence and this may be one reason for its exclusion in the later published version of the poem, which included facing English translations. Most of the English translations were typed by MacLean but the last five stanzas were missing from the typescript and were located on a handwritten fragment of a translation of Part VII. The praise poem appears to have been a mini crescendo before the last major lyric at the end of ‘An Cuilithionn’. I have found no details in MacLean’s letters relating specifically to this section of the poem and I can locate no evidence in his correspondence of reasons for its exclusion.

Despite MacLean removing the praise poem from ‘An Cuilithionn’ before publication, the omitted section is nevertheless of value to the overall poem because it highlights the role of the Cuillin as a multi-faceted symbol throughout the whole of ‘An Cuilithionn’. The praise poem actually contains all of the main elements of the symbol of the mountain as envisaged by MacLean. I have identified seven main themes in the praise poem; the Cuillin as witness to the wrongs of mankind and the sufferings in history; the Cuillin as connected to the sea and to boats; the Cuillin as sexual symbol and as the object of traditional Gaelic praise; the Cuillin as Stallion; the Cuillin as rampart; the Cuillin as a meeting place of genius and great

¹⁰⁴⁴ MacLean, 1999, pp. 98-102, p. 108.

minds; the Cuillin as a ‘metaphysical’ mountain and of polar opposites. Out of all of these images it is only the connection of the Cuillin with boats and the sea which is developed more fully in the praise poem than it is in the rest of ‘An Cuilithionn’ and for this reason it deserves more attention in future study.

While the published poem makes sense without its inclusion, when viewed in relation to the rest of the poem these twenty-seven stanzas go further than summarising what has already gone before. In the praise poem the statements about the Cuillin such as the mountain as Stallion seem more concrete and fixed. By praising the landscape in this way MacLean is giving a strong sense of permanence to the images and symbols that he has already developed with such energy earlier in the poem. He is fixing his own invented symbols in place by using traditional forms of Gaelic praise. In this way MacLean’s symbols are supported and given a sense of ‘history’ by using older, accepted structures and he is thus melding the traditional with the modern in an original and effective way.

A Chuilthinn Sgitheanach,
a Chuilthinn iargalt,
a bheannta fiadhaich
glaodh dian bhur rànaich!

Skye Cuillin,
Awesome Cuillin,
Savage mountains,
How vehement the cry of your
weeping!

A Chuilthinn chreagaich
nan sgùrr do-leagte,
a bheannta beadarr’
nan sgread cruaidh-ghàireach!

Rocky Cuillin
Of the overthrown peaks,
Wanton mountains
Of the shrill-screaching din!

A Chuilthinn fàire,
crios geur nan àrd bheann,
a Chuilthinn làidir,
crìoch ànraidh dhùilean!

Horizon Cuillin,
Sharp girdle of high hills,
Strong Cuillin,
End of hope’s agony!

A gharraidh mullaich
do aigne ’n duine,
a chreagan cunnairt
do spionadh rùintean!

Summit wall
Of man’s spirit,
Dangerous rocks
For the élan of desires!

A Chuilthinn ghaolaich,
frasd-mhullach aonaich,
gun ghais gun aomadh
gun chlaonadh shùilean!

Beloved Cuillin,
Topmost mountain height,
Unblemished undeviating,
With-out obliquity of eye!

A Chuilthinn ghlòrmhoir
nan creachan lòghmhor,
a stalla òirdhear, ceann sòlais sùgraidh!

A Chuilthinn àrsaidh
na trioblaid amhghair,
a Chuilthinn bhàrcaidh,
tha t' àrdan stòite!

A bheannta sùgraidh
nan aigne siùbhlach
a chuirp ghil rùiste,
a lùiths thar dòrainn!

Eanchainn nochda
thar ànradh lochdan
thar àmhghar bochdainn,
thar torchairt eigin!

Anam stàilinn
thar plogadh gàire,
thar dosgairn ànraidh
thar màbaidh stréipe!

A chridhe 'n iaruin,
inntinn shìorruidh,
eanchainn riaghlaidh
thar dianas eudmhor!

A Chuilthinn mhùgaich,
mhill dhorcha dùdlachd,
a dhuibhre smùidrich
thar lùiths ghil gréine!

A ghile 'n duibhre,
a sholuis shaoidhean,
a bheinn neo-chlaidhte,
a mhaoim-shruth euchdaich!

A Chuilthinn, Chuilthinn,
a chridhe duilghe,
a mheanmna shuilbhir
thar tulchann eucoir!

Long nan Daoine
ag gabhail maoim-shruth
thar loman aosda
nan aonach reubte.

Glorious Cuillin
Of the luminous bare summits,
Noble precipice,
Head of love-talk; ecstasy!

Ancient Cuillin
Of the trouble and agony,
Surging Cuillin,
Your pride is erect!

Wooring mountains
Of the unresting minds
Naked white body,
Strength beyond grief!

Naked brain
Beyond the misery of woes,
Beyond the agony of poverty,
Beyond extreme vicissitude!

Soul of steel
Beyond laughter's pulsing
Beyond distress's gloom,
Beyond strife's outrage!

Heart of iron,
Eternal mind,
Ruling brain
Above jealous vehemence!

Lowering Cuillin,
Dark mountain of dead winter,
Smoking blackness
Beyond the sun's white strength!

Whiteness in blackness
Light of the wise,
Unoppressed mountain,
Torrent-flood of deeds!

Cuillin, Cuillin
Heart of sorrow,
Spirit kindly
Above a mountain of wrong!

The Ship of the People
Taking the torrent-stream
Over ancient barrennesses
Of the torn mountains.

Soitheach sluaigh mhóir
ag gabhail fuaraidh
thar creagan chuantan
nan stuadh gorm beucaich.

The vessel of a great nation
Going to windward
Over ocean rocks
With blue roaring waves.

Long mhor na h-ùrachd
's a h-uisge stiurach
a' togail shùghan
thar dù-chreag sléibhe.

The great ship of newness
And her rudder-stream
Raising billows
Above the black rock of a mountain.

Long an t-saoghail
gun fhiaradh aomaidh,
gun shiaradh claonaidh
roimh ghaoith mhóir treuntais.

The ship of the world
Without deviation of surrender
Without veering of obliquity
Before a great wind of heroism.

An Cuilthionn luaineach
'na cheann uidhe bhudhan,
'na chruas suaimhneach,
'na luathghair glé-gheal.

The restless Cuillin
A destination of genius,
An august hardness,
A pure-white paeon.

An Cuilthionn àrsaidh
'na anam fàsmhor,
'na eanchainn lànmhoir,
'na chràdh geal éibhneis.

The ancient Cuillin
A growing soul,
A teeming brain,
A white agony of ecstasy.

Aigich Cuilthinn
a chreag-steud iomallaich,
Eistir fhuirbhidh
tha t' iomluas stòlda!

Cuillin Stallion,
Utmost rock-steed,
Giant horse,
Your multi-swiftness is stayed!

A Chuilthinn fhaoiltich
's tu mo smaointean
's tu rùn sgaoilte
cloinn daoine ghlòrmhoir!

Welcoming Cuillin,
You are my thoughts,
You are the divulged secret desire
Of glorious mankind!

Aigich bheanntan,
eich mhóir gun bhann ort,
a chuain gun sgraing ort,
a sheang fhiadh chrò-dheirg!

Mountain Stallion,
Great unbound horse,
Unstirred ocean,
Slender-bellied, blood-red deer!

A Chuilthinn trianaid,
àigich mhiadmhoir,
a steud-bheinn shìorruidh,
a chiall mhor thrèdrach!

Cuillin Trinity,
Great Stallion,
Eternal steed-mountain,
Great powerful reason!

A Chuilthinn eachdraidh
mheanmnaich, bheachdail,
a chreag gun sheacadh,
ri gleachd geur dòlais!

Cuillin of history,
Great-spirited, wise,
Rock unwithered
In the bitter strife of sorrow!

Eanchainn nochdta,
 a chridhe nochdta,
 a spioraid nochdta,
 a nochdachd sòlais!

A smùidrich fairge,
 a theine garbhlaich,
 a chaoir-ghal gharbh bheann,
 'fhalbhain glòire!

Naked brain,
 Naked heart,
 Naked spirit,
 Nakedness of ecstasy!

Ocean-smouldering
 Fire of rough hills,
 Flame-sorrow of rugged mountains,
 Glorious journeying one!¹⁰⁴⁵

¹⁰⁴⁵ For the Gaelic original see MS 29558, NLS, pp. 99-101. For the English translations see MS 29559, NLS, pp. 30-31, p. 102.

Appendix III

A Register of Names in Part I of ‘An Cuilithionn’ with Descriptions

In Part I of ‘An Cuilithionn’, Sorley MacLean mentions a considerable number of names in relation to the history of Skye and its landmarks. Where relevant, I have discussed specific figures in the main body of the thesis but I have provided below an additional list of names and how they relate to the Clearances in particular. MacLean was knowledgeable about his own local history and the details which he provides in Part I fully demonstrate this.

I have provided in each section a footnote which locates the part of ‘An Cuilithionn’ in which each of the figures are mentioned.

Ballingal:

Ballingal¹⁰⁴⁶ played a part in the clearing of Boreraig and Suishnish. He was the local factor for this area of Lord MacDonald’s estate. These clearances took place in 1852 and, since some of the crofters resisted eviction, they were forcibly removed. The snow that was on the ground made conditions very harsh for the crofters and one man who could not return to his home at Suishnish was found dead, having perished from exposure during the night.¹⁰⁴⁷

Fear a’ Choire (MacKinnon of Corry):

Fear a’ Choire¹⁰⁴⁸ or MacKinnon of Corry, was Lord MacDonald’s factor in the Braes area. The Braes dispute erupted in 1882 but the beginnings of it dated back to 1865 when MacKinnon took the common pasture of Ben Lee from the crofters without deduction of rent and let it to a farmer, Angus Macdonald.¹⁰⁴⁹ In 1882 on Lord MacDonald’s estate at Braes the crofters revived a sixteen year old grievance with the landlord. The crofters demanded to have back the grazing on Ben Lee, which was now used for the landlord’s sheep. They

¹⁰⁴⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 72.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Alexander Nicolson, *History of Skye: A Record of the Families, the Social Conditions, and the Literature of the Island* (Glasgow: Alex MacLaren, 1930) p. 384.

¹⁰⁴⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 72.

¹⁰⁴⁹ I.M.M. MacPhail, *The Crofters’ War* (Stornoway: Acair, 1989) p. 38.

refused to pay the rent for their crofts until this happened. The sheriff's officer was sent with summonses of ejection and the crofters forced him to burn his papers. Fifty policemen were then sent to Skye to help settle the uprising. The crofters met the policemen and charged at them. Sticks and stones were thrown by people and the women dealt and received blows. Seven women and girls (five of them Nicolsons) were seriously injured by blows from police truncheons. However, arrests were made and moderate sentences were given out but because of the publicity in the press gained from the Battle of the Braes the trial proved a moral success for the crofters.¹⁰⁵⁰

Fraser, William:

Major Fraser¹⁰⁵¹ (William Fraser of Kilmuir) was one of the chief proprietors of land in Skye in the 19th century. A member of the landed family of the Frasers of Culbokie in the Black Isle, he was an improving landlord and a Liberal in politics. It was on the Kilmuir estate that crofters complained most bitterly about rising rents.¹⁰⁵² Fraser cleared 14 townships and deprived the crofters of their grazing or arable land in order for him to have more land for his own mansion and woodland. According to Norman Stewart, one of Fraser's Valtos tenants, Fraser had cleared 21 townships and was 'the rack-renter, the process server, the persecutor of 'the brave old crofter''.¹⁰⁵³ Cameron, an early writer on the Crofters' War described him as 'a greedy and grasping Highland laird...the most conspicuous example of a ferocious and peremptory land merchant, hungering for a large return upon his capital.'¹⁰⁵⁴ At the beginning of the 1880s Fraser had trouble from crofters at Valtos due to the increases in the rents. This was a theme that was set to continue at Kilmuir and beyond.¹⁰⁵⁵

Geike, Archibald:

Areas such as Loch Shlaopain, north of Suishnish and Duirinish, a township in Glendale, are

¹⁰⁵⁰ MacPhail, 1989, pp. 42-46.

¹⁰⁵¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 72.

¹⁰⁵² MacPhail, 1989, pp. 18-19, 25.

¹⁰⁵³ MacPhail, 1989, p. 28.

¹⁰⁵⁴ MacPhail, 1989, p. 28.

¹⁰⁵⁵ MacPhail, 1989, p. 34.

now synonymous with the Clearances and are mentioned by MacLean for this reason. The tragedy of these places were catalogued by men such as Archibald Geike¹⁰⁵⁶ (1835-1924), a Scottish geologist whose *Scottish Reminiscences*, when published in 1906, recounts a Clearance that he witnessed near Suishnish in 1854:

One afternoon, as I was returning from my ramble, a strange wailing sound reached my ears at intervals on the breeze from the west. On gaining the top of one of the hills on the south side of the valley, I could see a long and motley procession winding along the road that led north from Suishnish. It halted at the point of the road opposite Kilbride, and there the lamentation became loud and long. As I drew nearer, I could see that the minister with his wife and daughters had come out to meet the people and bid them farewell. It was a miscellaneous gathering of at least three generations of crofters. There were old men and women, too feeble to walk, who were placed in carts; the younger members of the community on foot were carrying their bundles of clothes and household effects, while the children, with looks of alarm, walked alongside. There was a pause in the notes of woe as a last word was exchanged with the family of Kilbride... When they set forth once more, a cry of grief went up to heaven, the long plaintive wail, like a funeral coronach, was resumed, and after the last of the emigrants has disappeared behind the hill, the sound seemed to re-echo through the whole valley of Strath in one prolonged note of desolation. The people were on their way to be shipped to Canada.¹⁰⁵⁷

Not everyone hid the truth of the Clearances and MacLean is determined that the ‘cry’ ‘a chuala Geike ’s nach do cheil e’¹⁰⁵⁸ will be also heard in ‘An Cuilithionn’. It is clear that MacLean viewed Geike as a hero for not remaining silent about what he had witnessed. Geike’s reminiscences must have stayed in MacLean’s mind because there are many mentions of the desolate cry coming through history to MacLean in ‘An Cuilithionn’. Geike’s words – ‘a strange wailing sound reached my ears at intervals on the breeze from the west’ – are echoed by MacLean in Part I of ‘An Cuilithionn’ when he states ‘Chualas guth fann tiamhaidh/ air osagan na h-Airde ’n Iar:’ which later turns out to be the voice of the Gesto girl.¹⁰⁵⁹

Gibbon:

A crofter from Harlosh, John McPhee, told the Napier Commission that ‘The first factor we

¹⁰⁵⁶ MacLean, 1999, p. 72.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Archibald Geike, *Scottish Reminiscences* (Glasgow: James Maclehose and Sons, 1904) pp. 226-227.

¹⁰⁵⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 72.

¹⁰⁵⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 70.

had in Harlosh was Mr Gibbon. He was an Englishman and he was not a good one.¹⁰⁶⁰ The land of Harlosh had previously belonged to MacLeod and the people on this land worked at kelp. When the kelp failed the people could not pay their rent and MacLeod had the land valued at £60 in 1840. Mr Gibbon saw this as a bargain and took over the tenancy. McPhee told the Napier Commission that the families were removed by Gibbon:

He placed these families as close together as the sea would allow him; and we have but very little land, and it will not support us; and some of those he took from Minginish were placed upon peat soil, which had never previously been cultivated.¹⁰⁶¹

Gibbon came to Eboast after this time and another crofter, Neil Shaw, told the Commission that ‘when he came, [he] took a tack, and removed the tenants.’¹⁰⁶²

MacAlasdair na h-Àirde (Alexander MacAllister):

‘MacAlasdair na h-Àirde’¹⁰⁶³ is Alexander MacAllister (1744-1831), the laird of Strathaird, the MacKinnon homeland.¹⁰⁶⁴

MacCallum, Donald:

Rev. Donald MacCallum is linked to Beul-àth nan Trì Allt in ‘An Cuilithionn’¹⁰⁶⁵. MacLean compares it with the Volga, which is the longest river in Europe, flowing through the west of Russia through a chain of small lakes to the Rybinsk Reservoir and south to the Caspian Sea through Volgograd. The Volga has been described as Russia’s heart and is economically and culturally important to Russia due to its transport and trade links and it is mentioned in many Russian books and songs. By comparing the Volga with Beul-àth nan Trì Allt MacLean is connecting Skye with Russia and, by extension, Communism. Beul-àth nan Trì Allt is mentioned in relation to the Rev. Donald MacCallum who was a native of Craignish in Argyll and was minister of Hallin-in-Waternish in Skye from 1883 to 1887. He was a Christian

¹⁰⁶⁰ *The Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Conditions of Crofters and Cottars in the Highlands and Islands*, Vol. I, <www.highland-elibrary.com/7.html#report> p. 220{(consulted 3/10/07)}

¹⁰⁶¹ <<http://www.highland-elibrary.com/7.html#report>> p. 220 {consulted 3/10/07}

¹⁰⁶² <<http://www.highland-elibrary.com/7.html#report>> p. 81 {consulted 3/10/07}

¹⁰⁶³ MacLean, 1999, p. 70.

¹⁰⁶⁴ MacPhail, 1989, p. 26.

¹⁰⁶⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 74.

Socialist who became heavily involved with land law reform and travelled all over Skye and the mainland in aid of the cause. He was also arrested, at the same time as John MacPherson of Glendale, and charged with ‘inciting the lieges to violence and class hatred’. He spent a weekend in jail at Portree but was released on bail and was never brought to trial.¹⁰⁶⁶ In ‘The Poetry of the Clearances’ MacLean discusses MacCallum’s place in the events of the time. He also wrote poetry and although MacLean writes that he was not a great poet, ‘his direct, forceful, unadorned verse expresses great courage and optimism. In ‘Cumail suas an cliù gu bràth’ he uses the metre of Neil MacLeod’s despondent poem, ‘An Gleann san robh mi òg’, to sing of the manliness of the crofters of Bernera, Valtos, Crossbost, Siadar, Park and Aiginish in preventing the desolation of Lewis...’¹⁰⁶⁷ According to MacLean, Màiri Mhór composed these lines about him and Beul-àth nan Trì Allt is mentioned here: ‘Chunnaic sinn bristeadh na fàire/ Is neòil na tràillealachd air chall/ An là a sheas MacCaluim làmh ruinn/ Aig Beul-Atha-Nan-Trì-Allt.’¹⁰⁶⁸

MacDonald, Alexander (Alasdair Ruadh):

Alasdair Ruadh¹⁰⁶⁹ (or Alexander MacDonald) was the factor for most of the estates in Skye in the 1880s and was nicknamed ‘the uncrowned king of Skye’ by the Radical Press. He was also a lawyer and an agent for the Portree branch of the National Bank of Scotland. As a lawyer he had a firm grasp of the legal system, which was probably the reason for the crofters, at a meeting in 1884, calling for his dismissal and his replacement by someone ‘with a practical knowledge of agriculture’. Due to stresses on his health MacDonald resigned most of his factorships in 1886.¹⁰⁷⁰

MacKay, George:

George G. MacKay¹⁰⁷¹ paid £55,000 for the Raasay estate in 1872 and in the two years that

¹⁰⁶⁶ MacPhail, 1989, p. 105.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Sorley MacLean, ‘The Poetry of the Clearances’ in *Ris a’ Bhruthaich: The Criticism and Prose Writings of Sorley MacLean*, ed. by William Gillies (Stornoway: Acair, 1997) pp. 48-74 (67).

¹⁰⁶⁸ MacLean, 1997, p. 67. See *Màiri Mhór nan Òran: Taghadh de a h-òrain le eachdraidh a beatha is notaichean*, ed. by Donald Meek (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1998)

¹⁰⁶⁹ MacLean, 1999, p. 72.

¹⁰⁷⁰ MacPhail, 1989, pp. 26-27.

¹⁰⁷¹ MacLean, 1999, p. 72.

he held it he raised the rents substantially. He managed to make a £7,000 profit when he sold it.¹⁰⁷² James Ross, the factor for the estate in 1893 questioned the residents of the island and consulted estate records, concluding that:

During Mr MacKay's ownership [the rents] were raised all over, from seventeen to sixty-six per cent. In one township - Arnish - the increase was seventy-three per cent, the average increase over all the crofter townships on the estate being forty-three percent.¹⁰⁷³

In 1883, Rev. Angus Galbraith pointed out:

The people were quite willing to take their land at valuation; but the proprietor, perhaps thinking such a course might in some case rather diminish than increase the rents, told them they must either agree to his terms, or leave the island. The poor people were unable, and probably unwilling to leave, and so they were compelled to submit.¹⁰⁷⁴

MacPherson, John:

John MacPherson¹⁰⁷⁵ was one of the 'Glendale Martyrs'. He is buried at St Comgan's. For MacLean Glendale has connotations of heroism and both Macpherson and Glendale are mentioned throughout 'An Cuilithionn'. In 1881 the lease of a grazing (Waterstein) that had formally been held by only one person expired. Dr Nicol Martin's lease was going to expire at Whitsun, 1882 and he had announced that he had no intention of renewing it. The crofters of Upper and Lower Milovaig wanted to obtain the lease because their grazing was insufficient but since Sir John MacLeod, the proprietor, had died and there was a delay in settling the affairs, the factor, Tormore, took charge of the situation and inflamed circumstances by forbidding the crofters to keep dogs as they would worry the sheep. He wanted Waterstein for himself. He issued a notice to say that trespassing on the factor's sheep-grazings would be dealt with according to the law. He also provoked the crofters by putting up a fence between the Waterstein grazing and the common grazings of the two Milovaig townships and Borodale. The crofters signed petitions against the factor and this received publicity in the press.¹⁰⁷⁶ In 1882 the Glendale men chased two shepherds off the land - they had been employed to keep the Milovaig cattle and sheep off the Waterstein

¹⁰⁷² Norma Macleod, *Raasay: The Island and Its People* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2002) p. 118.

¹⁰⁷³ MacLeod, 2002, p. 119

¹⁰⁷⁴ Macleod, 2002, p. 118.

¹⁰⁷⁵ MacLean, 1999, p. 70.

¹⁰⁷⁶ MacPhail, 1989, p. 54.

grazing. The crofters who had been involved in this incident were later arrested with the help of a gunboat, the *Jackal*, to keep the situation in hand. John MacPherson, John Morrison, Donald MacLeod and Malcolm Matheson were tried in Edinburgh and were found guilty. They were imprisoned for two months and when they emerged on May 15th it was to a heroes' welcome. They became known in the popular press as the Glendale Martyrs. The publicity that the men received helped to highlight the plight of crofters and paved the way for the beginnings of the Crofters Party and the Crofters Commission.¹⁰⁷⁷

Martin, Dr. Nicol:

'Doctor Martin'¹⁰⁷⁸ is Dr Nicol Martin who owned one of the Glendale estates. His property extended along the western side of Dunvegan, including Borerraig. He held a tack of the Waterstein grazing on the far side of the township of Upper and Lower Milovaig.¹⁰⁷⁹ At the Glendale hearing Dr Martin remarked 'The crofters are getting indolent and lazy besides. Look at this winter: they did nothing but go about with fires on every hill and playing at sentinels to watch for fear of the sheriff's officer coming with warnings to take their cattle for rent...I would give £500 today if all the crofters on my place went away.'¹⁰⁸⁰ Dr Martin's relations also did little to endear themselves to the Glendale crofters who needed Waterstein for their own grazings – Dr Martin's nephew, Nicol Martin, accused the Glendale men of posting notices and petitions in the local post office that would incite the 'ignorant people to violence' and Nicol Martin's brother, Donald Archibald, offended the tenants by threatening that he intended to 'settle the whole of the Glendale people' and that they should emigrate to America.¹⁰⁸¹

Rainy, George:

The last laird of Raasay, John MacLeod, was in debt and in 1843 he emigrated to Tasmania and sold Raasay for 35,000 guineas to George Rainy.¹⁰⁸² As laird, Rainy attempted to convert

¹⁰⁷⁷ MacPhail, 1989, pp. 58-61.

¹⁰⁷⁸ MacLean, 1999, p. 70.

¹⁰⁷⁹ MacPhail, 1989, p. 53.

¹⁰⁸⁰ MacPhail, 1989, p. 80.

¹⁰⁸¹ MacPhail, 1989, p. 56.

¹⁰⁸² MacLean, 1999, p. 72.

as much arable land as he could to make room for sheep runs and this required the removal of the islanders. In order to keep the population down he forbade young people to marry and have children. If they wanted to have children they had to leave the island. By 1852 he had sent two boats of his tenants to Australia and in 1865 165 people left on another emigrant ship. The estate was then sold to Edward Wood, who came into conflict with the islanders when he decided to turn the land over to sporting purposes. By 1911 Raasay had been purchased by Baird and Co. and an iron mine had been opened. This mine was worked by prisoners of war during World War I. In 1923 the island was purchased by the Board of Agriculture for Scotland and the mine was closed. At the present time the Raasay is now largely in public ownership.¹⁰⁸³

¹⁰⁸³ MacLeod, 2002, pp. 100-101, p. 160, p. 167. In particular see pp. 100-104 for details on emigration numbers and specific dates.

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